A LITTLE MONEY AHEAD

Elsie Singmaster

A MYSTERY STORY FOR BOYS AND GIRLS

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A LITTLE MONEY AHEAD

By Elsie Singmaster

In her new story, Elsie Singmaster has left the southern Pennsylvania region which she has made familiar to her readers, and has selected New York City as the background for the adventures of her heroine, Lila Tryon. Left alone at the death of her father, Lila seeks a job in a New York bookstore. But she has not been able to lay anything by and she is seriously annoyed by the mysterious attention of strangers. Fellow-passengers in busses stare at her open-mouthed; the manager of a bookstore in which she applies for a job looks at her so intently that she runs away. A suspicious-looking woman engages an adjoining room in her boarding-house, where there are no other lodgers. She finds that, though her door was locked, some one has entered her room and has tried to open her trunk. How the mystery is solved and how she is relieved of her anxiety and uneasiness form an exciting plot, told with a combination of mystery and humor that is irresistible.

A LITTLE MONEY AHEAD

ELSIE SINGMASTER

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A LITTLE MONEY AHEAD

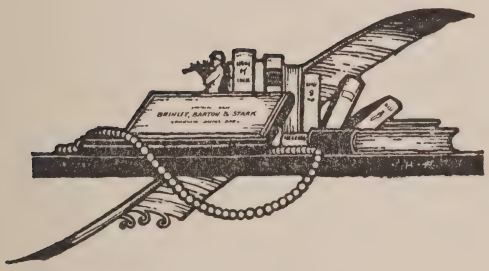
FOR THE FIRST TIME SHE THOUGHT OF THE CITY AS A JUNGLE IN WHICH UNKINDLY CREATURES PROWLED (*page* 106)

A LITTLE MONEY AHEAD

BY

ELSIE SINGMASTER

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS



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A LITTLE MONEY AHEAD

CHAPTER I

LILA WEARS HER BEADS FOR LUCK

It was almost the end of February, and spring was in the air. In the florists' windows hothouse daffodils and pussy-willows were taking the place of roses. Straw hats were numerous in every block on Fifth Avenue and the hurrying crowds had a new look of vigor; young people laughed aloud, and the mouths of older folk curved upward instead of downward.

Most conspicuous of all the indications of spring were the bright shades and tints in the shop windows; apparently the early season was to have purple as its most fashionable color. It was not the purple in which red predominates, but the bluish purple of violets, both deep and pale. Across from the Public Library in each of the broad and lofty windows of Groben and Roth bolts of purple silk

were arranged in rosettes two yards across; in a window near by appeared a family group, the father wearing a dark purplish blue suit and a purple tie, the mother in a purple jersey dress, the little girl in paler purple silk, the five-year-old boy in purple linen. Accompanying them was a white woolly dog with a purple bow on his collar.

The purveyors of flowers and fabrics were not the only merchants who observed the spring. Next door to Groben and Roth, Wickerham and Carter, dealers in books, celebrated in another fashion — on one side of the door was a display of maps, ancient and rich in color; on the other, the window was filled with books of travel — 'The Forbidden City,' 'The Jungle from the Air,' 'A Year in Cuzco,' 'On the Trail of Magellan.' Into both windows pedestrians looked with longing, and from them they turned with a sigh.

In Lila Tryon's apartment, high in a tall old building on East Sixtieth Street, there were no flowers and no lustrous silks, but here, too, in glorious light and sunshine, spring had penetrated. The upper story in which the

apartment was situated extended above the upper story of the next building and into the small front room lined with books and furnished with a large flat-topped desk, a deep couch, and three easy-chairs, into two bedrooms, and into a dining-room which was even smaller than the front room, poured the yellow flood. It shone upon furniture which was of good design, but old and worn, and while it cheered the heart, it brought out each defect in wood or upholstery.

The small bedrooms were so close together that Lila, standing before her bureau in the one, talked without lifting her voice to the trained nurse in uniform, standing before her bureau in the other. Lila was short, her eyes were gray, and her wavy brown hair was arranged in two braided knots on the nape of her neck. She was a young woman who in freedom from care and in happiness might be very pretty, but at present she was sorrowful-looking and worn, and older than her eighteen years. The death of her father after an illness of six months had deprived her of her only relative, and the heavy expense of his illness

had eaten up his savings. In a few minutes she would start to find a position, her only omen of hope the spring sunshine.

Miss Dorrance, the nurse, was a Canadian, a graduate of Bellevue Hospital. Called to attend Lila's father in the last month of his life, she had remained, renting the little room and taking cases. Her presence enabled Lila to hold the apartment until she recovered from the shock of her father's death and the exhaustion produced by anxiety and grief. Her presence had also kept Lila from despair. Two questions troubled her days and made her nights restless. How should she support herself, and where, if Miss Dorrance left, should she live? She had a good mind, a wide acquaintance with books, and a substantial store of general information, but she was not a graduate of college, nor had she had special training of any sort. Until a few weeks before his death, Horace Tryon had not dreamed that he might so soon leave her dependent upon her own efforts.

Miss Dorrance's very appearance was stimulating; she was short and broad-shouldered,

with clear blue eyes, bright curly hair, and a look of abounding health and good nature. Sometimes a shadow crossed her face, but it was only when her mind was free from the pains and troubles of others. She too was without kinsfolk and in leaving Canada she had left all her friends and acquaintances.

'It's a fine day to be starting on anything new,' said she, as she adjusted the graduate nurse's emblem with which she fastened her collar. Her voice was deep, her pronunciation Scotch and fascinating to Lila.

'It is, indeed,' answered Lila, whose own voice was at present, like her appearance, depressed and sorrowful.

Miss Dorrance put the last pin in her curly hair and bound all down firmly with a net.

'I believe you're going to have luck.'

'I hope so,' answered Lila. To herself she said, 'I wish I could think so.'

She opened the drawer of her bureau and stood considering the final detail of her costume — a necklace with which to brighten her black dress. Common-sense told her that

an applicant for a position should not look too mournful, whatever might be the depth of her sorrow. She owned three necklaces; one a string of green glass beads which was for her present wear negligible; one a string of heavy gold beads presented to her when she was a child; one a string of imitation pearls with a pretty clasp set with brilliants. The beads formed only the front of the necklace, the back being a slender chain.

She dismissed the green necklace with a glance, lifted the gold beads and contemplated them and laid them down. Then she did something which she knew was unwise — she took into her hand the dark green oval box which contained the pearl beads and stood looking at it. Across the cover ran an inscription in gold letters — 'Brinley, Barton, and Stark.' This firm of jewelers and silversmiths she believed to be the best in New York, and she considered her beads, imitation though they were, a precious possession.

Tears filled her eyes, and she moved the box so that one drop which threatened to fall should not mar the smooth green leather. Un-

warned by her emotion, she lifted the lid and looked at the pearl beads lying on their white leather bed. The involuntary sound which she produced brought Miss Dorrance hurrying to the door.

'What is it, Miss Tryon?'

Lila held out the box. 'Two years ago my father wrote a story. He could have written more if he hadn't had to write encyclopædia articles and book reviews and tiresome things like that. It was called "The Cause of the Poor." He was paid fifty dollars for it, though it was short and he was unknown. It was published and republished in newspapers and it brought him a great deal of satisfaction. He planned to write others. He wouldn't spend the fifty dollars for himself; he used it to buy me this for a Christmas present.'

Miss Dorrance took the box in her hand.

'It's beautiful. Know what I'd do this morning if I were in your place and looking for work? I'd put it on and wear it for a charm. You can feel that your father's sort of going with you, see?'

'I don't know that I believe in charms,'

answered Lila with a pale smile. 'But no doubt it would be a kind of company.'

'That's it, exactly,' said Miss Dorrance. 'It'll give you courage. Here, let me put it on. I've got something of my own I carry round.' Miss Dorrance touched a gold chain on her neck, and across her face, reflected in the mirror, passed a shadow. 'You look sweet, and the day's fine, and I'll be waiting here when you come back. Now take your foot in your hand, so to speak, and go along.'

Lila put on her hat and coat. She fastened her small black fur round her neck, but when she felt the warm outer air, she opened it. Her spirit brightened, she seemed to see her father's smile. The thought brought a thrill, then a pang.

'When I forget that he's dead, then I remember him!'

She walked briskly up the street to Fifth Avenue. The sun warmed her shoulders, the bright light cheered her; it was only when winter was changing to spring that one realized how dark and depressing the days had

been. When her father was compelled to face his short term of life, he talked over the future with her and advised her to find some work that had to do with books. 'You love books and know them; perhaps some day you may write one.' She was now following his advice; she was about to apply at a bookstore for work — the bookstore which she had long loved best, Wickerham and Carter's, across the street from the Public Library, a delightful place. She had often been inside and she never passed without looking in the windows, so cleverly arranged to catch the eye of the traveler with a little time to spare before he made his train at the station near by.

An older and more experienced person would have reminded her that work was hard to get, that she would do well to have in mind more than one bookstore, and that she must be prepared for disappointment. But the older and more experienced person would have been unwise, since for Lila there was at this moment no possibility of effort unsupported by hope.

'I believe they'll give me a place,' said she

over and over to herself. 'Surely they'll give me a place!'

At the intersection of Fifth Avenue she mounted a bus. The distance was not long, but she still lacked physical strength, and the fare was small. She preferred a seat on the top, but she did not feel equal to ascending and descending the steep and narrow stairway. It was a busy hour, and the seats in the interior were all occupied except one at the front, where a stout lady moved over as far as she could to make room.

Lila faced the rest of the passengers, but having lived all her life in the city, she was indifferent to casual glances. There were persons who thought of New York as a place of prowling beasts — that was, she believed, nonsense. Quiet in her behavior and modestly dressed, she had never been offered any rudeness. A sensible person put herself into no compromising positions, and if any one should address her without reason, or show her any unpleasant attention, it was always possible to depart. She looked out at the florists' lovely exhibits, at the purple dresses and hats

and parasols in the windows, and suddenly she sighed as though a part of her burden were lifted.

She saw something lovelier than flowers and silks — a beautiful child in his mother's arms halfway down the other side of the bus. He smiled at her and waved his hand and she smiled back, and then his mother smiled also. Her heart warmed; she sighed again, a deeper sigh, as though her burden were removed.

When the baby turned away, she was aware of another and less pleasant pair of eyes regarding her. So intent was their gaze that she was startled, and before she could look back to the window her own eyes were held as though she were hypnotized.

The person who behaved so amazingly was a man of perhaps forty-five years who had every appearance of a gentleman in features and clothing. His manners, however, were not those of a gentleman; he stared round-eyed as a small child might stare, and in a fashion for which only a small child could be excused. She looked away at once, thinking herself mistaken; then involuntarily she

glanced back. He was still gazing at her; his expression not exactly that of a person desiring to attract attention, but rather that of one who was startled.

'Have I grown a hump?' she said to herself, amused yet irritated.

Again she looked away, again she looked back — the stranger was still gazing at her. Escape was at hand; Forty-Second Street was past; the next stop was hers. She rose, and again, against her will, let her glance fall upon the stranger; he was still regarding her with the same intent and curious stare. Safe on the pavement as the bus moved on with him in it, she had a whimsical desire to send a childish grimace after him.

'Some sort of a lunatic!' said she to herself. 'How did he get that way?' Now she smiled — it was many weeks since she had felt an impulse to be facetious.

Crossing the avenue she approached the store of Wickerham and Carter, and as usual her heart gave a throb of pleasure. She saw in the window north of the door the ancient and interesting maps, with pictures of curious

animals embellishing their supposed habitat, and with delicate coloring dulled by age; she saw in the window to the south the handsome volumes of travel with their alluring titles; her eye caught the names of far-away places.

She began now to pray, saying the words in her heart alone, without a motion of her lips. 'Oh, please! Oh, please!' Her alarm and her necessity put a flush on her cheek. For the first time she said to herself, 'Suppose they won't have me!' She felt weak and made an effort to straighten her shoulders. The confusion of her thoughts blinded her.

When her vision cleared, she was standing in the long and beautiful store. Round her rose tier upon tier of books; at the distant end was a glow of sunlight and a blur of green which she observed for the first time, though she had frequently visited the store. Here and there were human beings; nearest her was a tall man. He was without overcoat or hat — clearly he belonged in the store. His height and manner suggested that he was its head. She stood looking at him helplessly; it seemed to her that an hour passed and still

he did not move. Thoughts of flight passed through her mind, but she lacked strength to take a step.

'What shall I do?' she thought wildly. 'What shall I do?'

CHAPTER II

'THAT WAS EASY!'

At last the tall man looked down and Lila looked up. He was middle-aged, with gray hair and tanned and ruddy face. He took a step in her direction.

'What is it?' said he, as though to a child.

Lila steadied her voice. 'May I see the manager of the store?' she inquired.

'What is your business?'

'I'm looking for work.' She did not intend to press her hands together — she knew from experience the significance of that anguished gesture. 'May I not talk to the manager for just a minute?'

'Oh, yes!' The man smiled. 'Just for a minute!'

'I hope to find a place in a bookshop,' she explained. 'I have to earn my living.'

'Have you ever worked in a bookshop?'

'No,' said Lila. 'But I believe I can learn. My father was a writer. I love books better than anything in the world.'

'What was your father's name?'

'Horace Tryon.'

The tall man looked at her with interest. 'Not the Horace Tryon who wrote a story called "The Cause of the Poor"?'

'Yes,' answered Lila.

'And you want work?'

Though much depended on her answer, Lila was dumb. Again she clasped and unclasped her hands.

'Come here into my office and let us talk.'

The tall man stepped through an opening in the counter and laid his hand on the knob of a door. Within was an office with several clerks at work. He opened another door which led into a tiny room enclosed by glass and there invited Lila to sit down and sat down himself. His face, which Lila saw now on a level with her eyes, was kind.

'Now let us hear,' said he.

'There isn't much to tell,' answered Lila breathlessly. 'My father was unable to save very much and his illness took everything there was. I'd work very hard. I'm a little tired now, but I'll soon be myself again.'

'Would you be willing to take a clerk's place?'

'Oh, yes!'

'Would you be willing to begin with a very small salary?'

'I would, indeed!'

The tall man touched a bell and a young girl appeared at the door.

'Yes, Mr. Nunnelly?'

'Ask Miss King to come here, please.'

Again restraining herself with difficulty from pressing her clasped hands to her breast, Lila held them in her lap, her fingers interlaced. Her cheeks grew whiter; again a long time passed and there was no sound from without but the click of typewriters, no motion within but that of Mr. Nunnelly's hands turning over the letters on his desk. She began to say without a motion of her lips. 'Oh, please! Oh, please!' Presently she heard a curious sound and turned her head. Some one was approaching with an irregular and shuffling step.

'Come in, Miss King,' invited Nunnelly in answer to a knock. He looked up as though to greet a pleasant and welcome visitor.

At sight of Miss King, Lila understood the curious sound of her approach — she was lame and walked with a dragging step and a dip to one side. She was, nevertheless, distinguished in appearance, with deep-set blue eyes, and dark hair which curled naturally in broad waves. Mr. Nunnelly gave her his chair and perched on the desk.

'Miss King, you said this morning that you'd like an assistant in your department, at least until summer. Here's a young woman who says she's the daughter of Horace Tryon.'

'Who wrote "The Cause of the Poor"?' asked Miss King, her eyes brightening.

'Yes,' said Lila.

'She's in search of work. She says that she loves books. Should you like to try her as understudy in your department?'

'Why, yes,' answered Miss King slowly, 'I believe I should. She looks as though she could learn. Do you know anything about children's books, Miss Tryon?'

Again Lila felt confusion of mind. Now it was a confusion of happiness. It required an effort to frame her simple answer.

'I used to review children's books when any were sent to my father,' said she at last. 'He got all kinds.'

'Then you've had very good training for my department,' said Miss King.

'Suppose, Miss King, you show her your new sun-parlor,' suggested Mr. Nunnelly. 'Let her look about; then if she wishes to take the place, you make the arrangements with her and have her stop and speak to Miss Graham. Meanwhile, I'll talk to Miss Graham.'

Lila lifted her clasped hand to her breast. Her finger-tips touched the smooth pearl beads. Perhaps there was something in charms! 'How happy he would be!' said she to herself, and followed Miss King's lame progress down the aisle toward the green and sunlit spot. At the end of the long store a circular room had been built. Books composed the walls, and it was furnished with little chairs and tables, ferns and bright geraniums and a singing bird.

'Here we are!' said Miss King.

'Ah!' said Lila, at the same instant. 'What a heavenly place!'

Miss King laughed. 'This is my idea of heaven too. Books and sunshine — though we only have such brightness as this for a few hours in spring and again late in fall when the sun shines through a space between two buildings. In summer we're fortunately in shadow. Plants we have too, and good children. You see, children are allowed by their parents to come here and select books for themselves. Their nurses or tutors bring them — that kind of children. We show them the books and watch them while they look at them, so that no injury is done, and they order what they like.'

'And you direct them to good things.' Lila's eyes shone. 'There's a sentence somewhere about making good and noble things pleasant to children.'

'Exactly!' said Miss King. 'Miss Farrell, whom you see yonder, leaves on March first to be married. That's next Monday. Can you be on hand at half-past eight?'

'Indeed, I can.'

'Perhaps you'd like to stay for a while this morning and see how Miss Farrell manages. There's a chair.'

Lila sat down heavily.

'Tired?' asked Miss King.

'A little,' confessed Lila. 'You know how it is when people are sick.'

'Yes,' answered Miss King, 'I know all about that.'

Miss Farrell, a pretty, black-eyed girl of perhaps twenty, had a little boy in charge and was showing him from shelf to shelf. He was a precocious and extraordinary child who seemed to have read all that there was for a child to read and was now advancing into the realm of adult books. Presently she let him sit down at a low table with several volumes and went to meet a little girl and her nurse.

'I'm ordered to see that she gets a nice book, ma'am,' explained the nurse. 'She's Mrs. Thompson Preston's little girl.'

'I don't want a book,' declared Mrs. Thompson Preston's little girl furiously. 'I hate books. If I get a book, I'll tear it up.'

'But you never saw such a book as I have,' coaxed Miss Farrell.

It appeared presently that the little girl did want a book; in fact, she wanted two or three.

'The more the better,' declared the nurse under her breath. 'I've taken care of many children, but never such a fury as this.'

At noon Lila rose to go.

'Like it?' asked Miss King.

'Very much.'

'I'll look for you, then, on the first. Miss Graham is the cashier; Mr. Nunnelly asked you to speak to her.'

'Twenty dollars a week for the beginning, Miss Tryon,' said Miss Graham from behind her brass grille. 'We hope you'll be happy here.'

'Thank you,' answered Lila earnestly. 'I'm sure I shall be happy.'

Outside she looked up the street, then down. What a marvelous city New York was, more wonderful by far than any ancient city! Babylon, Nineveh, Rome in its glory — none, she knew, was so splendid as this. With a lighter heart than she had carried for weeks, she walked to the corner. The temperature had risen, the air was balmy. Men were carrying their overcoats and women walked with their wraps flying open and their fur scarfs in their hands.

Again she mounted the bus and now she had no adventures. She saw no lovely babies and met no impertinent eyes; her thoughts were fixed upon Miss Dorrance and her pleasure in hearing that all was well. Miss Dorrance was her dependence — if only she would continue to rent a room, so that she might hold the apartment which had been her home for so long!

'Finding work was easy!' said she to herself. 'Easy! Now if I can only save and get a little money ahead!'

The elevator in the apartment house was like the apartment house itself — very old, and it moved with exasperating slowness. At last she stepped out and the door clanged behind her and she hurried down the hall.

'Easy!' she said to herself again. That was what she was going to say first of all to Miss Dorrance if Miss Dorrance had not been called out — easy! Her hand was on the knob, the word was framed on her lips when she heard near at hand a sound. She stood motionless — what could it be — not a sob! It was a sob — some one was crying. She

looked round bewildered — yes, the sound came from her own apartment! But only Miss Dorrance was in the apartment! Had she had bad news? Turning the knob, she opened the door and halted, astounded.

Miss Dorrance had said she would be waiting and here she was. But how strangely placed and companioned! She sat on the deep old couch, her head on the shoulder of a young man who sat close beside her. He looked, even as he sat, tremendous; he created an atmosphere of wind and heather and high hills and open sky. For an instant he gazed stupidly at Lila and Lila gazed back stupidly at him; then he smiled. Then he threw back his head and laughed. Instantly Miss Dorrance lifted her tear-filled eyes; she gasped, then she sat up, her face scarlet.

'Miss Tryon!' she gasped.

'Yes,' said Lila, backing swiftly out. 'I beg your pardon. I'll go at once.'

Miss Dorrance struggled up from the deep couch, her hand supporting her not inconsiderable weight upon the arm of the young man.

'You'll do nothing of the kind!' she pro-

tested with fervor. 'You'll stay, and this young man shall leave and I'll tell you everything.'

The young man rose, and Lila's eyes involuntarily followed his head as it ascended toward the ceiling. His own eyes were very kind and friendly and of Miss Dorrance's clear blue; his cheeks were flushed, his smile was infectious. He laughed again even more heartily — clearly he was not in the least embarrassed.

'You're her brother!' cried Lila.

'No, I'm not,' he answered positively. 'And I wouldn't be her brother for the world.'

'His name's McClean,' wept Miss Dorrance. 'Donald McClean. And this' — Miss Dorrance nodded toward Lila — 'this is Miss Tryon.'

'Glad to know you, Miss Tryon.' The young man took a broad hat and a pair of gloves from the desk. 'I'll venture back when all the explanations are over.' He bent and kissed the top of Miss Dorrance's curly head, then he went out the door and his firm tread echoed down the hall.

CHAPTER III

THE MISSES BRANDON

Miss Dorrance rubbed her eyes, tried to speak, rubbed them again, and finally sat down and buried her face on the arm of the sofa. Her curly hair had escaped from her net; the right sleeve and shoulder of her uniform were crushed and wrinkled. Again she sobbed.

For a moment Lila stood regarding her, then she sat down beside her.

'Do tell me what's the matter,' she begged earnestly.

'I — I ——' After three or four efforts Miss Dorrance controlled herself and sat erect. 'That was my lover,' she wailed. 'We had a quarrel. I was mean, selfish, cruel. I can't find words bad enough to call myself. I came away. I didn't even let him know where I was. I treated him shamefully. But I was punished. I thought of him all day, and every night for two years I've cried myself to sleep.'

'He seems to forgive you,' said Lila, a twinkle in her eye.

'That he does — kind, loving, forgiving, is what he is. And now he's taking me away.'

'Yes?' said Lila, growing pale.

'He's got everything fixed, passage and all. Day after to-morrow we go back to Scotland where his home is. He was only in Canada temporarily, he was in Quebec. That's where we got acquainted.'

'Yes?' said Lila again soberly.

'I know what it means to you, Miss Tryon, darling. He and I've been talking about what you're going to do. I thought I was fixed here; I looked forward to staying for years. You think you can't arrange to keep on the apartment?'

Lila shook her head, the slow tears running down her cheeks. 'No,' said she. 'No. It costs too much and I have no money ahead.'

'Then you'll have to find a room somewhere.'

'I've got work,' announced Lila. 'I had no trouble finding it. A place in a bookstore.'

'You have! Good for you! Everything

went out of my head except me going away. Is it where you wanted to be?'

Lila nodded.

'Is it a nice place?'

'I think so.'

'This is what I thought I'd do,' said Miss Dorrance. 'It won't take me long to make my arrangements; I've got nothing to arrange but a few uniforms. I thought I'd spend all day to-morrow helping you get settled, then in the evening he's invited you to have dinner with us before we take the boat. We're going to get married before dinner and you're to be the witness and the wedding-guest.'

'You're very kind.' Lila spoke tremulously; it seemed that there was nothing left to do but to acquiesce in what had come upon her. 'But where can I find a room and how can I pack all my things in a day?'

'I have a place in mind,' said Miss Dorrance. 'It's a house owned by two old ladies, the Misses Brandon. I lived there for several months. You may think it queer, but it's respectable. When you see the old ladies, you'll

know their morals are of the best. They're very funny — I would have told you about them if everything hadn't been so sad. I meant to tell you some day. It isn't a house where you'll want to stay forever. You'll make friends as I did when I came to New York; then you'll want to live with some of your friends. But till then it'll be all right.'

'Where is it?' Lila spoke with a sinking heart.

'It's over on Fifty-Seventh Street. It's just about the last private dwelling that's left on the block, a high old brownstone house. All round are apartments and business places; it alone is left of the old times. On the lower floor there's a tailor, on the second there's a beauty parlor — a nice young lady keeps that, she calls herself a "beautician." Then upstairs are Miss Rachel Brandon and Miss Berenice Brandon. You call it "Bernicey." They have four rooms on the third floor and they rent out three rooms on the fourth. The front room I had; then the middle room is filled with goods stored by a

former lodger; then there's another room. It was empty all the time I was there.'

'I suppose I couldn't take my things? Couldn't I take a bed and bureau?'

Miss Dorrance shook her head. 'You couldn't get them up the stairs. And what would be the use? Why don't you store them here till you can look about? I believe the janitor would keep them for you — he's very kind.'

'I couldn't give them up forever,' said Lila with a quivering chin. 'They're all I have left in the world.'

'Of course you couldn't!' Miss Dorrance rose. 'Why don't we go this minute and see what's to be seen? We could get a good start at packing this evening. Are you too tired?'

'No.'

'I must bathe my eyes,' said Miss Dorrance. 'I'm a sight, but I guess nobody will look at me. I told Donald I must help you, and that he wasn't to dare come back till to-morrow, but I believe he'll come anyhow, and he'll be good help with the boxes.'

The elevator sank less rapidly than Lila's heart. The blow was not unexpected; she had known ever since her father's death that she might have to find another place to live, but it was no less hard because it was expected. She glanced at Miss Dorrance — she had put on a coat which covered her uniform and was adjusting her hat before the mirror, on her face a look of intense happiness and excitement. Her cheeks grew redder and redder and her eyes brightened until she was transformed. She took hold of the gold chain round her neck and drew from her bosom a locket.

'See, there's his picture! I've worn it all this long time.'

As they stepped into the street, she clutched Lila's arm.

'Oh, I've been so unhappy!' she cried in an unsteady voice.

'I hope you'll always be happy now.'

'I know you do, dearie, I know you do. Your own time to be happy'll come, be sure of that!'

'I'm not at all sure,' said Lila.

'Yes, it will! Only don't be a fool like me and not know it when it does come.'

'You may depend on me for that,' promised Lila soberly.

Arm in arm the two crossed Fifth Avenue and walked southward.

'Here it is, down this street,' said Miss Dorrance. 'See, there's the sign — Room for Rent. That means they haven't a tenant. They'll be glad enough to see you. The one is sick, or she thinks she is — that's Miss Berenice. She sits all day in a chair and her sister has to wait on her. She's deaf, and her sister shrieks at her. You'll hear all their troubles.'

'What are their troubles?' asked Lila.

'They've got a mortgage and it's eating them up. Miss Rachel, the active one, wants to pay their way into a home before their money's all gone, but her sister won't give up. She says the only way she'll go is feet foremost. You'll hear her say that a hundred times. They're very funny. Miss Rachel answers Miss Berenice in the sauciest way, but Miss Berenice can't hear. Sometimes

Miss Rachel fairly yells. That's the way she relieves her mind. I'd yell too.'

Before Miss Dorrance finished her sentence they arrived at the foot of the brownstone steps. The tailor shop occupied what had once been the parlor.

'The tailor's name is Bernard Jay, short for Bernard Jacobs,' said Miss Dorrance as they entered. 'There's only one thing against him — he lives on onions. Now, upstairs' — Miss Dorrance sniffed the air — 'upstairs there's a different kind of perfumery.'

The woodwork in the second floor was painted white. On a glass door were the words 'Miss La Rue, Beautician,' and from behind the door came cheerful sounds.

'But, my dear!' said a high-pitched voice. 'Why have gray hair?'

'Sweet as honey,' commented Miss Dorrance. 'Come on, dearie, another flight.'

The voice of Miss La Rue followed them as they climbed.

'I tell you we had some words, Miss Gracey. I said to him, I said, "Believe me, I've cut my eye teeth," I said.'

Suddenly a dark object cast its shadow upon them and Miss Dorrance glanced up. 'Hello, Miss Rachel!'

'Oh, it's you!' The voice was pleased, though sharp. Its owner was a thin dark woman about seventy years old with an anxious look. She stared past Lila at Miss Dorrance and her surprised expression sharpened to one of hunger.

Miss Dorrance climbed the last steps. 'Got room for a lodger?'

'Yourself?'

'No, my friend, Miss Lila Tryon,' explained Miss Dorrance. 'She'll be a better lodger than I.'

There was a loud pounding on the floor.

'Is that Miss Berenice?' asked Miss Dorrance. 'How is she?'

Miss Rachel did not answer — she had transferred her hungry gaze to Lila. Miss Dorrance walked into the front room, and Lila followed. Beside the window sat a large, stout woman with a broad and very white face and a black wig, a little awry. Her speech was low and deep with a sort of rumbling

undertone which echoed from room to room. She was not a ludicrous figure; she was imposing, even awe-inspiring.

'Well!' said she. 'Good-afternoon!'

Miss Dorrance went close to her and shouted in her ear.

'I'm bringing you a good lodger! You treat her right.'

Miss Berenice peered curiously at Lila as though the sight of a stranger was rare. 'I will. She looks like a lady. I'm tied here, tied till I go feet foremost.' Miss Berenice spoke cheerfully, as though her stationary position gave her a sort of satisfaction. From the hall sounded a loud and scornful sniff.

The rooms were filled with old and large pieces of furniture, the relics of former grandeur, bought in a period when bulk and heaviness were admired. They seemed to suit Miss Berenice, but Miss Rachel moved among them like a child in a house built for giants.

'Do you wish to see the room?' she inquired.

'We do,' answered Miss Dorrance. 'Shall I take Miss Tryon up?'

'You may.'

Miss Dorrance led the way to the upper story. 'Don't expect too much,' she warned in a whisper. 'The bed's comfortable and clean and you're perfectly safe here. If I were you I'd arrange to stay.'

She opened the door into a good-sized room which extended across the front of the house. There were three windows — that was an advantage, but there was even more furniture to the square foot than below, and furniture of strange design. Among the pieces were a large walnut corner cabinet which might well be described as a what-not, a large oak cellaret, and a huge mahogany wardrobe.

'It's the cheapest place I ever heard of,' said Miss Dorrance. 'And I can't believe that you'll have to stay long. There's a gas plate, you see. You can get your meals yourself for very little.'

'What does the room cost?' inquired Lila.

'Only ten a week, paid in advance. It isn't worth any more, but it's worth that to you. Do you think you'll try it?'

'I guess I'll have to.'

'You'll get along,' promised Miss Dorrance. 'I know you will.'

'I hope so,' said Lila.

At the foot of the steps waited Miss Rachel, her bright eyes on Lila.

'She's made up her mind to try it,' said Miss Dorrance.

Miss Rachel's cheeks flushed; into her eyes came a look of profound relief.

'I told her what I paid.'

'That's all right.'

Notified by the shadow that the girls had descended, Miss Berenice pounded her cane on the floor.

'Come in; I want to talk to you.'

'You do, do you!' said a sharp voice.

Lila looked quickly round — was it Miss Rachel who spoke? Warned though she had been, she was startled.

'This young lady's going to stay,' shouted Miss Dorrance into Miss Berenice's ear.

'That's good. I guess you told her how long I've had the atharitis?'

'Nonsense!' said Miss Rachel. 'Atharitis nothing! Stubbornness!'

Again Lila looked sharply round — Miss Rachel appeared blandly indifferent to her surprise.

'She'll come to-morrow evening,' shouted Miss Dorrance into Miss Berenice's ear. 'I'm going to be married to-morrow and she's coming to the wedding.'

Miss Rachel looked astounded. 'What!'

'Have you a man?' asked Miss Berenice.

Miss Dorrance nodded.

'Where did you get him?'

'What a fool!' said Miss Rachel.

'I got him in Canada,' shouted Miss Dorrance. 'A very fine man. We must go now, and I must say good-bye. We're going to Scotland to live.'

'What's his business?'

'Shipping. Good-bye and thank you for your kindness to me.'

'Good-bye, good-bye!' thundered Miss Berenice. 'They say it's damp in Scotland. I hope he treats you well. You take a chance. The papers are full of stories of how badly men treat their wives.'

'Idiot!' muttered Miss Rachel.

'I'd like you to kiss me,' roared Miss Berenice. 'It means luck to kiss the bride.'

Miss Dorrance gave each of the sisters a hearty kiss.

'Miss Tryon will come back to-morrow evening, and her trunk will come some time in the day.'

'The expressman must be paid,' stipulated Miss Rachel.

'He will be,' promised Miss Dorrance.

'I've got to get boxes to pack my books in, I suppose,' said Lila when they were in the street.

'I'll see the janitor and get boxes and find whether he can store your things,' offered Miss Dorrance. 'I'll do all the hard work. You'll surely write to me, won't you?'

Lila nodded. From the corner the two girls looked back. Miss Berenice had somehow found strength to rise and lift the window and from it her black head projected. Above her from a window in Lila's room popped a gray head and quickly withdrew. Lila laughed hysterically.

'They're afraid you'll escape,' said Miss

Dorrance. 'You will, too, before long, I'm sure.' She gave a little skip, then looked round apologetically.

'Be cheerful!' said Lila. 'It doesn't hurt me.'

CHAPTER IV

A WEDDING AND A MOVING

THE fine weather lasted another day, and again the bright sunshine poured into Lila's apartment, but now upon a different scene. In the front room the rug had been taken up and rolled, one of the easy-chairs was turned up on another, and the third stood upon the desk. The desk was cleared of its papers and the familiar inkstand and tray, the windows were curtainless, and on the floor stood boxes into which a giant was rapidly packing books. Besides Donald McClean there was space for little else in the room.

'You've got to come to see us, Miss Tryon,' he called in a loud and pleasant voice. 'You come and spend a whole summer with us. I'll show you the country; you can sail on a loch and gather bouquets of heather.'

'I'd like to.' The fainter voice of Lila answered from the inner room, where, with the bed taken apart, there was plenty of free space. Lila bent now over a trunk, now over

a box, in which she was packing those belongings which she would need at the Misses Brandon's. Her wardrobe was small, but there were other articles, the extra pillow which Miss Dorrance advised, a warm blanket, covers for her bureau, table linen for her lonely meals. In addition there were books which she could not do without.

'You're mighty lucky to sell one bedroom set right off the bat,' called Miss Dorrance from the other bedroom where she was taking down the curtains. 'I'm going to start in the dining-room now. Don't you want to pick out enough dishes for your little table, and a saucepan and a frying-pan and your little coffee-pot? Donald can carry them over in a suitcase. He could take them now — they'll be as safe as in a bank. I'd like to see a burglar tackle Miss Rachel, or Miss Berenice either!'

When McClean departed with the heavy suitcase, Miss Dorrance accompanied him as far as the basement, where the agent had his room. He agreed to store Lila's belongings at six dollars a month.

'Isn't that a good deal?' asked Lila, when after a long time Miss Dorrance returned. Her cheeks were rosy as though she had been out-of-doors.

'I suppose you'll have to pay that much anywhere,' answered Miss Dorrance. 'I hope it won't be for long. He'll send up for the things after we're gone.'

Lila proceeded with her packing. Now and then she stood perfectly still as though to take account of her surroundings. 'Can it be that I'm leaving my home?' said she to herself. She looked about — the cracks and stains on the paper showed in the bright light; every picture had left a faded spot. There were no books, no dear familiar things. This was no longer home.

Presently there came two men to carry the bedroom set down to the apartment of the buyer. McClean was gone more than an hour; when he returned, he brought sandwiches and bananas and they ate their lunch hurriedly and continued their work.

They grew more and more quiet; when McClean and Miss Dorrance passed each other,

they exchanged long looks. Sometimes they whispered a few words.

'It isn't going to be!' said Miss Dorrance. 'It's too good to be true. Something will happen.'

'In an hour it's going to be,' declared McClean. 'What can happen?'

'We could be run over in the street.'

'No, we couldn't!'

'Perhaps we can't find a preacher.'

'But I've got the preacher engaged,' said McClean. 'He won't want to miss his ten dollars. Besides, there are a thousand other preachers, and there's City Hall.'

'You're sure the license is all right.'

'Sure!'

Each conversation was interrupted by a sort of remorse for their happiness.

'You'll surely answer my letters, Miss Tryon, won't you?' said Miss Dorrance for the third time.

'Indeed, I will!' promised Lila.

Presently the last box was nailed shut.

'Now, girls, get ready,' said McClean. 'It's four o'clock and in a few minutes, if he's

honest, the expressman'll come for the trunk; at five we get married; at six we start on a solid meal; at eight we go on board the Romaine.'

Lila took from her trunk a small and heavy roll of gray canton flannel. 'I want to give you your wedding present now,' she said to Miss Dorrance.

'Not your lovely silver spoons!' protested Miss Dorrance.

'Not those you've seen,' explained Lila. 'I've selected something I have two sets of, so you can't say a word. They were a wedding present to my mother and they've never been used. They came from Brinley, Barton, and Stark on Fifth Avenue.'

'That grand place where your beads came from!' Miss Dorrance let Lila put the spoons into her hand. 'I never in my life owned a piece of solid silver.'

'You have twelve pieces now,' said Lila. 'I wish it were a complete set — knives, forks, spoons, everything; and a tea-service as well.'

'You come and eat from them,' invited McClean. 'Remember!'

'I will,' promised Lila again.

The expressman kept his word; Lila's trunk and box were removed; then McClean and Miss Dorrance collected Miss Dorrance's belongings. Lila gave a last look round the dismantled rooms. The apartment presented a blank wall to the western sun; it was dismal, unattractive, desolate.

'I wouldn't look round, dearie,' advised Miss Dorrance. 'There are brighter days ahead.'

Lila walked bravely out the door and down the hall. The elevator man regarded her with sympathy. 'Good luck, Miss Tryon!'

In the lower hall the janitor waited. 'Your father was my best tenant, Miss Tryon. He was here ten years. I wish we had some single rooms. Perhaps you'll come back some day and take an apartment.'

'Thank you,' said Lila in a muffled tone.

'You'll soon have a better place than this, prophesied Miss Dorrance.

The minister who waited in a quiet church had a Scotch burr which was even more pronounced than that of the groom. The cere-

mony took but a few minutes; then he wished them well and gave them their certificate, and they lifted their bags and walked a few blocks to a hotel. There McClean checked the luggage in the lobby and asked to be directed to the dining-room. There were two, he was told, the one a formal room close at hand, the other a restaurant opening on another street and approached by a long passage.

'That's where we'll go,' said McClean. 'In a restaurant you're freer than in a hotel dining-room.'

In the restaurant patrons were assembling for dinner. It was a quiet and simply furnished place, frequented apparently by those who enjoyed good food and who preferred peace to confusion. There was no music, and one party had apparently little interest in the arrival of another. Lila and her friends had about them no suggestion of a wedding; their faces bore no expression of hilarity, their clothes had no festive air. An observer glancing at them would have found the black dress and the pale face of Lila far

more conspicuous than the cheerfulness of the bride and groom.

'I want a very good dinner,' announced McClean to the waiter. 'But not too long-drawn-out.'

The waiter obligingly offered suggestions. 'Our blue points are said to be very good, sir; and I can recommend our fricasseed chicken, and we have many delicious ices and pastries, sir.'

'Blue points and chicken will suit us, plus potatoes *au gratin* and celery. We'll select dessert later. Won't that be all right, young ladies?'

Lila and Miss Dorrance nodded.

'I can serve you promptly, sir.'

McClean looked at his watch. 'We'll give you a good hour.'

'That's ample, sir.'

Lila held her hands tightly clasped in her lap. She had once ridden in a Ferris Wheel and, high in air, she had held desperately to the bar in front of her seat, hoping by some miracle she would be safely returned to the ground. She was now in a similar situation,

removed from all that was familiar. Her situation was worse; all to which she was going was strange. Her desire not to shadow the happiness of her friends was, like the bar to which she had clung, the only support of her composure.

'A great steamer's a wonderful place, isn't it?' said she.

'I've never been on anything but a lake steamer,' answered Miss Dorrance. 'It'll be very queer. Donald's been round the world.'

McClean seemed preoccupied. His eyes were fixed on some object back of Lila's shoulder.

'Haven't you, Donald?' asked Miss Dorrance.

'Oh, yes!' He seemed to give her his attention with an effort. 'Several times. I was supercargo on a trans-Pacific freighter for five years.'

Between the oysters and the main course, Lila looked round the room. The company was more numerous, but still of the same quiet variety — the women were plainly dressed, the men looked intelligent. Now

new arrivals glanced round and bowed and smiled to those already seated. A young woman entered alone and there was a sudden silence, then a renewed murmur of conversation. She flushed and smiled and sat down at a little table by herself. She gave an order and leaned back and first a man, then a woman, crossed the room to speak to her.

'I wonder who she is,' said Lila.

The waiter brought the second course, and as she lifted her fork Lila accidentally read the name stamped on the silver.

'Why, this restaurant is the Touraine!' she said, astonished.

'That's the name of it, I believe,' said McClean. 'I hope it's all right.'

'I didn't realize where we are. This is the restaurant to which famous writers and playwrights come,' explained Lila eagerly. 'There may be many people all round us who are known over the world.'

'They don't look very famous,' said McClean. 'From where I sit I can see a pair that haven't very good manners.'

Miss Dorrance laughed. 'Not all famous

people have good manners. I've found that out. I've taken care of a few.'

'I wish I knew who some of our neighbors are,' said Lila. 'My father used to be acquainted with famous people.' Mentioning her father, she loosed her hold on her supporting bar, and instantly a throng of recollections and sorrowful forebodings rushed into her mind. 'You've lost your father and your home. You're going to live in a strange and unpleasant place. You have little money and your position is yours only for a short time.'

Glancing at Lila, Miss Dorrance began to talk rapidly. 'This chicken looks to me like the last word in goodness. I was going to say, "Donald, be sure to give the company the white meat," but it's all white meat. There's a little onion flavor.' Miss Dorrance talked on and on.

Lila clenched her hands. Presently she offered a remark and Miss Dorrance looked relieved.

The chicken was finished, the pastry selected and eaten, and still McClean continued

to bend a somewhat dark gaze on an object beyond Lila's shoulder. While the bride looked out for herself, he helped Lila on with her coat and walked out of the restaurant beside her. To her surprise he proceeded not to the passage into the hotel but to the outer door, then into the street, then round the corner.

The street was empty of its hurrying crowds, the great shops were dark, the towering office buildings almost abandoned. There was a change in the air; the balm of spring had vanished; in its place was February's rawness. McClean led the way back to the hotel.

'Round Robin Hood's barn,' commented Miss Dorrance. 'Why this walking tour?'

'Let's sit down on this sofa for a minute,' proposed McClean.

'Glad to,' assented Miss Dorrance.

'There's something that troubles me,' said McClean. 'If Miss Tryon goes with us to the boat, she'll have to go all the way home by herself. I don't like that.'

'Oh, but I'm accustomed to the city and to

McCLEAN CONTINUED TO BEND A SOMEWHAT DARK GAZE ON AN OBJECT BEYOND LILA'S SHOULDER

going about by myself!' said Lila. 'I've always lived here. I'm not afraid.'

'But it will be late,' said McClean. 'I couldn't feel comfortable about it. Now you do this to oblige me. We'll leave our bags here in the hotel, and we'll ride with you on a bus and see you safely to the door of your old ladies. How about it, Nellie?'

'I'd feel more comfortable, too,' said Miss Dorrance earnestly. 'You're very tired, Miss Tryon, and you'll be much better off resting and getting strength for your work. This is Friday and you start in Monday. Don't you think it would be sensible to go home?'

'I suppose so,' agreed Lila drearily, her mind echoing mournfully the word 'home.'

'Then let's go.'

As the three rose, laughing at the awkwardness of lifting themselves from the deep sofa, they came face to face with two young men. The encounter was not necessarily intentional; the young men had not followed them from the street, they came from the long passageway by which the wedding party had approached the restaurant. But there

was unmistakably a sudden change in their aspect — both looked intently at Lila. The eye of one young man caught her own and for a moment she was unable to withdraw her gaze. His face was unusual in shape; instead of the oval chin which seemed to belong to brow and cheek, he had a square chin. He was not tall; his surprised and apparently startled eyes were far below those of his companion.

Instantly McClean laid his hand on Lila's arm and moved her toward the door. He walked rapidly toward Fifth Avenue, now and then looking back over his shoulder.

'What on earth is the matter, Donald?' asked Miss Dorrance, puffing in the rear. 'Are we running a race?'

'Those young chaps were impertinent,' said he. 'They stared at us throughout the meal.'

'Not at you and me!' laughed Miss Dorrance.

'No, not at you and me. If it had been at you and me, or if we hadn't been leaving Miss Tryon, I should have had a word with them.'

'And why should they stare at me?' Lila's voice was disturbed — there was no doubt that the shorter young man at least had been startled at sight of her. 'And if they did, I'm no infant!'

The three climbed into a bus. Travel was not heavy; the two girls found a seat together, and McClean sat behind them.

'I agree that this is the sensible thing to do,' continued Lila. 'But I believe you were mistaken about my admirers — they seemed to glance at me casually and then to look away as though they were disappointed. Perhaps they thought at first that they recognized an old friend.'

'They saw me, and that disappointed them,' said McClean grimly.

On the pavement in front of the house of the Misses Brandon the three stood still. The wind was quickening — it came unmistakably from the east. McClean clutched his hat.

'Winter's coming back; feel that!' said he. 'We'll have a rough sea. I'm afraid you're going to be laid out, Mrs. McClean.'

'Sure enough, I am Mrs. McClean!' laughed Miss Dorrance. 'I didn't realize it. But I'm not going to be laid out! Would you like me to go up to your room with you, Miss Tryon?'

'It isn't necessary,' protested Lila bravely. 'Miss Berenice would want to see if you really have a young man and find out his salary and you might miss your boat. I'd like to say once more ——'

Miss Dorrance caught her in her arms. 'Don't say it! Don't say even good-bye! Don't say anything, but promise that you'll come to see us.'

'I will.'

McClean took Lila's hand in both of his. 'Remember I asked you first.'

'No, you didn't!' contradicted Miss Dorrance. 'Now let's see you safe inside, Miss Tryon. And keep up your courage.'

Lila walked bravely up the steps and, without a backward glance, opened the door and stepped in. To the right the lofty doors into the parlor were closed, but not even a solid wall could quench the odor of Mr. Jay's

favorite vegetable, even now simmering in fat on a stove in a room back of the parlor.

'I will not cry,' said Lila, and climbed the stairs. 'I'm determined not to cry.'

At the top a faint light shone from a flame within an old-fashioned globe of glass. She could read the business sign of Miss Blanche La Rue, Beautician, but behind the glass door the room was dark. From above echoed a voice.

'Taxes are eating us up!' shrieked Miss Rachel. 'Eating us up!' There was no answer; Miss Rachel was moving about in the rear room; clearly she was merely giving expression to nervous energy, not arguing with Miss Berenice, far away at the front. Her shadow darkened the stairway. 'Is that you, Miss Tryon?'

'It is.'

'Did you put the latch on the door?'

'No, but I will.'

Lila went down the stairs — as she climbed back, she felt thankful that her bed was near at hand.

'We keep the door locked at night. The city gets worse and worse. If ever you're going to be out, I'll give you a key.'

With increasing slowness, Lila climbed on.

'When that pale young woman comes in, you tell her I want to see her,' ordered Miss Berenice in her rumbling voice. 'I want to ask her about that young man that the nurse has got.'

Miss Rachel made violent motions to Lila — they could have but one significance — friendly advice to escape to the fourth story.

'Go on up!' said she. 'You'll have chances enough to talk about the young man that the nurse got.'

Amused and a little cheered, Lila continued her ascent. The stairs were curved so as to take as little space as possible; she resolved to be careful in descending.

'If I should fall and break a bone, that would be the end,' said she.

She sniffed the air. There was an odor here pleasanter than that of onions, more refreshing than that of scented powders and unguents. She reached the head of the stairs —

into her crowded room shone the dim light from the hall.

'The matches are just inside the door,' called Miss Rachel.

Lila struck a match and lit a light above her bureau. The pressure made the flame scream. In one dark space towered the mahogany wardrobe, in another crouched the walnut what-not. The door of the cellaret was open; the shelves had long been empty. The covers of the bed were turned back; on the bureau stood flowers in a vase, with a fragment of paper tucked between a rose and a carnation, and on the bureau lay a letter, addressed in Miss Dorrance's hand.

Lila lifted the slip of paper — on it was written, 'From the groom.' She opened the letter — it said:

'*Dear Miss Tryon*, I wanted to leave you a little present, and I didn't know just what, so I paid the storage on your things till August 1. By that time I hope you will have them with you. Thank you for many kindnesses. If I had stayed in America, I would have stayed with you always.'

Lila ran to the window and opened it and leaned far out. The buses were evidently delayed — she could see her friends standing at the corner. McClean lifted his arm to signal, a bus stopped ponderously. She saw both of them look back, Miss Dorrance waved her hand, then they stepped aboard and were gone.

Slowly she closed the window, slowly she turned and looked round the strange and unattractive room. The light given out by the gas burner did not extend into the corners — between the mahogany wardrobe and the wall there was space for several persons to hide. Involuntarily she looked at the bed — were not the covers swaying?

'Nonsense!' said she, and walked toward the wardrobe. The angle of the wall became plain — there was nothing before it but empty space.

'Silly!' said she, and bending looked from the far side of the bed toward the light. 'By and by I'll be rolling a ball from one side to the other!' The floor was clear — even, she saw with pleasure, of dust. She opened the

wardrobe door — the interior was bare and clean.

She looked back at the bed. Before her intention had been diverted by the sinister corners of the room, she had intended to throw herself down and yield to the day's gathering necessity for tears. Instead she walked to the bureau and looked herself as sternly in the eye as a weary creature could.

'To-morrow morning you unpack your trunk first of all,' said she. 'Then you go to the Public Library. On Sunday you go to the Metropolitan Museum and see the Swedish exhibition. On Monday you have work. Brace up!'

Peering about for her trunk, she discerned it under the middle window. On it was a parcel wrapped in brown paper and tied with string. Inside were a dozen rolls in a bag, a half-pound of butter in a box, and a pound of coffee in a tin can. On a paper was scribbled: 'Here's your breakfast; fortunately you like your coffee plain. Good luck!'

Lying down at last upon her bed, she shed a few tears, but while she wept she smiled.

Before morning she dreamed a confused dream. She saw Miss Dorrance plainly — she stood on the prow of a sailing-ship ploughing the waves. On each side of her stood a young man, one tall like a giant, the other short with a square chin. She tried to fill out the features above the square chin, but in vain.

CHAPTER V

'A GOOD BEGINNING'

On Monday morning, March first, Lila woke early. The east wind had brought its inevitable accompaniment of rain; on Saturday there had been a steady downpour; on Sunday showers were followed by periods of sunshine, and sunshine by heavy showers. By leaning out, Lila could see a good deal of the sky, and she believed that she marked the very moment when the clouds ceased to speed from east to west and began to scurry from west to east.

From a window in the hall she could see a smaller space of sky and the backs of many tall buildings. The rear room was unoccupied, as Miss Dorrance had hoped, and she could leave her door open. The house was well heated, the odor from the first floor less objectionable than she anticipated. If Miss Rachel and Miss Berenice kept up their strange duet of contradiction, in which one

heard not a word the other said, it was while she was away from the house.

Both on Saturday and Sunday she had been tempted to stay indoors and both times she had forced herself to go out. She was prepared for rain with coat and umbrella and on Saturday she read in the Library and on Sunday she visited the Museum. On each day she ate a late and hearty breakfast of rolls and jelly, and each day had a warm and early dinner in a drug-store where soup and sandwiches and hot chocolate could be had at a reasonable price. She did not altogether enjoy her meals — a vague uneasiness robbed the food of its taste.

'I must eat,' said she. 'And I must eat enough to give me strength, but I must be careful about how much money I spend.' The thought remained in her mind, coming every now and then to the surface. 'I must be careful; I must spend as little as I can.'

On Monday morning she ate two rolls. They were a little stale, but edible with butter. Two remained for the next morning — then she would get a loaf of bread and set

up her toaster. It was astonishing how much one could spend for food — McClean's bill had been almost ten dollars — and, on the other hand, on how little one could live. How wonderful it would be to go to the Touraine when one felt inclined and entertain one's friends and know others who were there!

Recalling the Touraine, she flushed — how foolish she had been to remember even in a dream the young man and his eager regard! She flushed again — she had looked back at him as if fascinated — if Donald McClean had not led her away, she might be looking at him yet.

Having breakfasted, she prepared to set out. Her trunk had a strong lock, and into it she fastened her few belongings of value and put the key in her handbag. She felt inclined to wear her pearl beads, but put on the heavy gold beads instead. She rubbed a little color into her cheeks and drew a nervous breath.

'By and by when I feel stronger, I'll walk down every morning. That will be good for me. Oh, I hope I shall please Miss King!'

At last she put on her hat and coat and closed the door of her room. The fresh air and the bright sun had apparently revived the vigor of the Brandons; as she stepped into the hall, she heard the deep voice of Miss Berenice from the front of the third story, the shrill voice of Miss Rachel from the rear.

'The sky's clear,' said Miss Berenice calmly. We're going to have a fine day. Has that pale young woman gone out? The sun will be good for her.'

'The taxes are eating us up!' declared Miss Rachel wildly.

'I suppose the young woman's all right,' said Miss Berenice. 'I suppose you had her pay her rent in advance.'

'One more payment of taxes and we won't have enough left to get into the Wainwright Home,' shrieked Miss Rachel. 'One more payment — that will finish us.'

Lila slipped down the stairs. On the second floor Miss La Rue was unlocking her door.

'Good-morning,' said Lila.

'Good-morning!' replied Miss La Rue airily, with a pronounced accent on the

'good.' She was a tall girl with red lips and very bright cheeks. 'A fine morning, I'll tell the world.'

The door into Mr. Jay's tailor shop was open and he sat cross-legged on his table. He did not look up, but sewed as though his life depended upon it.

Outside all the world was going to work. The air was filled with the sound of automobile horns, the pavement with hurrying pedestrians. A man in front of Lila began to run, another followed, so as to catch the bus now lumbering into view at the corner. A crowd struggled to clamber aboard; happily another bus followed immediately and Lila found a comfortable crevice inside the door. From there she looked, not out at the purple-decked windows, but against the back of a man's coat.

'I'll begin by walking home in the evening,' she planned. 'I'll take it slowly and stop halfway and get my dinner. I must find cheap places and spend as little as I can. Mr. Nunnelly said I could have a place till summer. What, I wonder, does he mean by summer?

I'll have to save every possible penny. Perhaps he meant that I was to go then for good. Or did he mean that I would be taken on again? I must be careful,' said she once more to herself. 'I must count every penny.'

Mr. Nunnelly answered her question as soon as she entered the store. A young woman asked her to step into his office and there she sat down in the chair beside his desk.

'Miss Tryon,' said he, 'Miss King feels certain that you will be able to learn her ways. As you will remember, this plan was suggested as an arrangement for the spring. In summer — that is, beginning in June — the book trade diminishes, and we shall have no work for you in June or July. The third week in August Miss King begins her two weeks' vacation — while she's gone, if you have proved yourself capable, we shall take you on in her place, and afterwards you may continue as her assistant. Does this arrangement suit you?'

'Yes,' said Lila bravely.

Nunnelly looked at her intently. She was, he would have said, 'good stuff.'

'We'll pay you twenty dollars a week, and if you'll give us your word to return in August, we'll pay you ten dollars a month for June and July. You'll then be on our pay-roll; this will be a help to you this summer, and it will be an advantage for you in our pension insurance system.'

'I'll give you my word,' promised Lila earnestly.

'This arrangement need not prevent you from taking other work in addition if you wish.'

'Thank you,' said Lila, rising. 'I think you've been very kind.'

'If I were in your place I'd plan to take some library work before long, either at the University or across the street,' advised Nunnelly, opening the door. 'You could easily get a certificate of some sort from one of these institutions and it would be an advantage.'

Miss King was in her pleasant quarters.

'Good-morning,' said she. 'You've gained a little color. Did Mr. Nunnelly speak to you about your work and your salary?'

'Yes.'

'Did he suggest your taking a course at the Library or the University?'

'He did. I'd like to do that as soon as possible, but I'll have to wait till I get caught up financially. Mr. Nunnelly said he'd pay me a sort of bonus this summer, but I'll have to get something to do during those two months.'

'I hope you'll not think me impertinent if I ask whether you have any regular income besides what you earn?'

'I won't think you impertinent,' said Lila. 'The answer is "No."'

'Have you anything ahead?'

'Very little.'

'Have you any relatives?'

'I have some very distant cousins in California whom I don't know.'

'You couldn't appeal to them for a loan, I suppose, if you got into a tight place?'

'Oh, no!'

'Have you any friends near New York whom you could visit for a week or two?'

'No,' said Lila. 'We lived very quietly. My father studied and wrote all the time and

I kept house for him. Just before he died, the publishing firm which employed him was combined with another and the men he had known retired and younger men took their places. Other friends we had have died.'

Miss King bit her lip meditatively. 'Have you property you could sell? Don't think me too inquisitive.'

'I have this chain of gold beads,' said Lila. 'And another of imitation pearls. I'd be dreadfully grieved to have to sell them.'

'I don't believe you'll have to. Anyway, we won't cross bridges till we come to them. A great city's a cold place — it's each for himself. It couldn't be otherwise. I have an invalid sister who has three children, the oldest fourteen. Fortunately, we have our own little place out on the Island. If I can only work on a few years till the boys will be earning, then we shall begin to feel secure. — Now there are a few things I want to tell you about your duties.'

Lila listened to instructions about the recording of sales and the making out of duplicate slips.

'She'll be my friend,' she said to herself. 'And I'll do my best.'

'Mr. Nunnelly is interested in you,' said Miss King. 'There comes our first customer. Suppose you take her, and I'll be at hand to help.'

At noon Miss King brought from a closet a pasteboard box neatly wrapped.

'Miss Tryon,' said she, 'I thought that, since this is your first day, you might be a little tired and might like to eat your lunch with me. I asked my sister to pack a double portion. I'm allowed to bring mine here as a special privilege.'

Lila tried to express her thanks in a steady voice, but failed.

By five o'clock her face had no vestige of color and her knees trembled, but she was happy. There was nothing too difficult about her work and there was much that was interesting. Walking home was impossible and she climbed aboard a bus. Miss King told her she might help herself to unlimited loans from a store of damaged books and she had one under her arm. At the corner drug-store

nearest the Misses Brandon's, she sat at a little iron table and ate vegetable soup and a cream puff. It was six o'clock, but there was still a glimmer of light in the western sky. She longed to linger outside and walk a few blocks toward the river, but the journey to the Brandons' upper story was all that she dared undertake.

Mr. Jay's door was open; he did not cease working at five. Miss La Rue had gone. From upstairs came Miss Berenice's heavy voice and Miss Rachel's shrill and inapropos answers.

'It's time for that young woman to be in. What is her name?'

'I've told you her name forty times.' Miss Rachel's answer was not even directed toward the front of the house.

'I hope she's not one to stay out late.'

'I don't know what difference that would make to you,' said Miss Rachel.

'I hope she has no followers,' continued Miss Berenice. 'I should have to speak to her.'

Advancing on the second flight, Lila smiled.

'The Wainwright Home is a genteel and respectable place.' Miss Rachel approached close to Miss Berenice. 'I tell you once more that if we don't go soon we can't pay our way, then the Island for us.'

'I cannot walk downstairs,' declared Miss Berenice with imperturbable dignity. 'You know that perfectly well, Rachel. When I go feet foremost, I go; not until then.'

Lila reached the third story. Leaning forward, Miss Berenice saw her in the hall.

'Young lady!' she called. 'Come in.'

'She'll never let you go!' said Miss Rachel.

Disregarding this warning, Lila entered.

Miss Berenice looked at her with an intent gaze. 'You have a book!' she said.

With a mighty effort Lila made her hear. 'I'm allowed to bring home damaged books from the shop where I work. Are you fond of reading?'

'Am I fond of reading?' Miss Berenice's black eyes gleamed. She held out her hand; it shook with eagerness.

'You may have the book to read,' said Lila, passing it over. 'It's a book of travel.'

Miss Rachel came to the door. 'A book?' she cried eagerly.

'I can bring you all the books you want,' shouted Lila to Miss Berenice. 'I'll get them from the store where I work and from the Public Library.'

The eyes of Miss Berenice and Miss Rachel met in a momentary flash of friendliness.

'We used to be great readers when we were young,' said Berenice proudly. 'We had many books, but they are gone.'

'We ought to be able to buy books now,' said Miss Rachel. She went out of the room crying, 'There's a library in the Home; if we went there, we should have books.'

Lila climbed to her room.

'I'll bring them books,' said she. 'I'll find what kind they like. That will keep them friendly, and perhaps they'll trust me for a while this summer if I'm hard up.'

This evening she thought neither of Miss Dorrance nor of Donald McClean — both had vanished as though they had never been. Nor did she remember any bright-eyed, square-chinned, and staring stranger. When,

as the clock struck seven, she laid her head on her pillow, she thought of Miss King and Mr. Nunnelly.

'I believe I can please them,' she said happily, and in a moment was fast asleep.

CHAPTER VI

'ON THE TOWN'

At half-past eight on the morning of Friday, the twenty-ninth of May, the sky — that is the portion which Lila could see from her window — was blue. Had she been able to see more sky, she might have observed near the horizon a pearly haze which dimmed the blue. The wind, moreover, was from the east, and she knew well a wind from the east is in New York City an almost unfailing indication of bad weather. However, being indoors, she did not feel the wind and there was no tree or vane within sight by which she could gauge its strength or its direction.

She gave the sky only a cursory glance; her mind was upon other matters than wind or weather. To-morrow was a holiday and this evening her three months' service at Wickerham and Carter's was to come to an end; when she returned to her room she would be without work for two months, a depressing and serious prospect. Her money, except

fifteen dollars in her pocket, was spent for necessities, and the twenty dollars she would receive this evening, plus the two tens offered by Mr. Nunnelly as a bonus, would not see her far through the summer. Her services had met not only with approval but with hearty praise — this satisfaction she had.

As she left the window she rubbed her hands lightly together. 'I wonder what I shall do,' said she aloud. 'What shall I do?'

Standing before her bureau she put on her hat; then she took it off, in order to slip her gold beads over her head. As she reached for them, her hand stayed its course. When she went to Wickerham and Carter's to ask for a position, she wore her pearl beads because Miss Dorrance had said they might be a charm. Miss Dorrance had written several times, but until this moment she seemed far away. Now Lila heard her voice clearly — 'They'll be sort of company for you.' She took the key of her trunk from her handbag and in a moment was regarding the beads on their leather mat. Tears filled her eyes.

'How beautiful they are!' she said. 'I'll wear them; it may help.'

She stood at last with her hand on the door. 'I've accomplished a good deal,' she thought. 'I've supported myself for three months. If only I had been able to save a little money ahead!'

Locking her door, she went down the stairs. The storeroom was closed, the unoccupied room which was, like her own, overcrowded with furniture, was open. She hoped to pass unheard and unseen the apartment of the sisters, but already Berenice was in her place at the sitting-room window, already Rachel was stepping from room to room at her work. Both saw her pass through the hall.

'It's a bright and pleasant day, Miss Tryon,' said Berenice in her rumbling voice. 'Pleasant weather is likely to continue.'

'Continue nothing!' This was the voice of Rachel. 'What do you know about the weather? You never go out.'

'There's every prospect of a bright Memorial Day,' declared Berenice.

'There's every prospect of a continuous downpour,' contradicted Rachel.

'Little did I think so many Memorial Days would find me in prison!' sighed Berenice.

'You could get out,' said Rachel shrilly. 'You could easily get out.'

Undetected Lila slipped down the steps. Miss La Rue and her assistant Miss Gracey were exchanging loud opinions about the undesirability of permanent waves for elderly heads.

'Don't tell 'em I said so, but it's fatal,' said Miss La Rue.

'I'll say, don't tell 'em!' advised Miss Gracey. 'The grayer the hair the worse the ruin.'

'I'm going out with Mr. Cassidy this evening,' said Miss La Rue. 'No one ever showed me a better time than he did last week. Taxi, flowers, and supper after the show.'

To this Miss Gracey returned no answer; she herself was not attractive and her duty as audience to Miss La Rue's accounts of her popularity must frequently have been burdensome.

The descent from the bright regions of the beauty parlor into the darker regions of the

first floor was no more abrupt than the descent of a cloud upon the spirit of Lila. Opening the door she stood under a sky already partly gray. Suddenly certain that she would be dismissed, she stroked her pearl beads, not as the foolish victim of superstition taps on wood, but as the child reaches out for its father's hand. So occupied was she with her sorrowful reflections that she did not heed the damp and quickening wind which warned her to return for her umbrella and raincoat.

At the corner she waited for the bus which would take her down Fifth Avenue. The sum of ten cents seemed enormous and she wished that she had started earlier and had walked. For some weeks she had been walking home, tired though she might be, and when she returned to work in August, she would walk both back and forth. She began to add and multiply; by walking she saved twenty cents a day; six times twenty is a dollar and twenty; four times a dollar and twenty is almost five dollars — this much she had wasted in a single month.

As she entered the bus, a woman rose to

depart and she took her place. Usually she climbed to the top and looked with intense pleasure upon the noble buildings, the handsome churches, the windows filled with bright fabrics and beautiful pictures, the unending stream of people. Lately merchants had been decorating the second-story windows as gayly and elaborately as the first.

Still oblivious to the alteration in the sky, she left the bus and crossed the street. The blue had entirely disappeared, and the wind whipped the skirts of women and caught the hats of men. An exhibition of children's books and etchings in the windows of Wickerham and Carter had been replaced last evening with a collection of first editions of modern novels, but she did not notice the change.

Entering the door she walked down the broad aisle toward her department. She knew all the clerks and liked them — there was Miss Fowler of the fiction department, and Miss Large who knew everything that was to be known about rare old books and maps and many other delightful things; there

was Miss Graham behind the cash register. All looked at her kindly, and she thought sympathetically.

She saw Miss King far away in her own department and Mr. Nunnelly talking to her. He had just come in and had not taken off his light overcoat. He looked at Lila as she approached and it seemed to her that he abruptly closed his conversation with Miss King. Probably he was talking about her — it could not be that he had changed his intention to take her back in August!

'The first of June is at hand, Miss Tryon,' he said. 'You understand my plan for you?'

'Yes,' she answered. 'I'm to come back the third week in August.'

'That's right. And you'll have your pay this evening, and then, if you'll stop in, ten dollars on the last of June and ten on the last of July. You'll keep in touch with Miss King, will you not?'

'Yes,' promised Lila.

Nunnelly passed toward the front of the store and Lila smiled at Miss King.

'It's very comfortable to feel I have friends

in this great city.' She meant the words as a joke, but they did not sound like a joke. 'What's that queer noise?' she asked nervously, her arm halfway out of her coat-sleeve.

'Rain!' answered Miss King. 'Listen to it!'

The rain had begun, not with a few scattering drops as rain usually begins, but with a heavy downpour, so sudden that persons close to the curb could hardly get to the shelter of doorways before their hats were ruined. In a few minutes the pavement was filled with the racing figures of those who in suburban homes had been deceived like Lila by the sunshine and had not observed the pearly haze or noticed the direction of the wind.

'I've had on my mind for a long time the rearrangement of these shelves,' said Miss King, with a keen look at Lila. 'Suppose we begin now, even if it is Friday. I'm sure we'll have time if the rain keeps up. I'll put you on the stepladder and I'll stand down here.'

The rain slackened and again grew heavy; the air darkened, and as the thick coating of moisture shut out much of what light there

was, the electric lights were turned on. There were few customers in the children's department; the day was too bad for children to be out.

Again Miss King urged Lila to share her lunch. 'My sister seems to have put up a very large amount for one person,' said she. 'We'll send the errand boy for fruit.'

The lunch was delicious, and as they ate the sandwiches and the potato salad packed in paper containers, Miss King spoke for the second time about her own situation.

'A person is in the depths of despair,' said she. 'Then, suddenly, everything clears up. My sister's oldest boy has a good place for the summer. He'll be able to earn his clothes for next winter and probably still more, and the second will earn something too. If only we can get them safely through college! If I keep my health and my position, we can manage.'

At five o'clock, Lila put on her hat and coat and wrapped round her shoulders a black knitted scarf which she kept at the store for emergencies.

'Have you no umbrella?' asked Miss King.

'I stupidly left both umbrella and raincoat at home,' confessed Lila. 'I'll watch for the bus and make a dash for it, covering my hat with this scarf.'

'Don't forget your pay!' warned Miss King. 'And come in soon.'

'I will.'

'Don't you think you'd better take some books? Take all you can. They'll help pass the time. Wrap them up well in newspaper.'

'I will,' said Lila. 'The old ladies where I live are hungry for books.'

Lila stopped at the cashier's desk. Miss Graham lifted a check and glanced at it and passed it over.

'But you've made my check thirty dollars,' said Lila. 'It should be twenty.'

'Mr. Nunnelly said it was to be thirty,' answered Miss Graham. 'And he says you're to go on thirty when you come back.'

Happy, her heart beating rapidly, Lila waited in the doorway of the store. One bus approached, another, another — all were crowded. Eventually they would be less

crowded or some one would get out, and there was no reason to hurry. She stood looking down the avenue until she began to feel a vague discomfort. Some one was standing near her. She turned her head sharply. A woman dressed in black stood looking at the exhibit of novels in the window north of the door. She had neither umbrella nor storm-coat and she was apparently indifferent to the rain. She had the appearance of one who might have called a taxi if she wished.

As Lila gazed at her, she turned her head and lifted her eyes, presenting the strangest face. Her skin was very white, her eyes and eyebrows and hair were black; she had not, as one would have expected, artificially brightened cheeks or lips. She stood looking at Lila as though she were turned to stone, or like a person with a momentary confusion of vision who, fixing her attention on an object vaguely seen, waits for it to become clear.

Then, with the suddenness of a flash of lightning, her mental processes appeared to quicken. Her gaze became bright and intent; she took a step forward; then instantly with-

drew and seemed to be looking again at the books in their bright jackets. Her head, however, was slightly turned toward Lila and her eyes were shining.

'Some sort of lunatic!' said Lila to herself for the second time in a few months. 'How did she get that way?'

Seeing a bus approach, she ran, gathering her loosened scarf round her. She believed that the strange woman followed, but did not succeed in boarding the bus, and in the close pressure of human beings taller than herself she could not see whether she had walked on or had returned to her contemplation of the window.

Lately Lila had glanced quickly round when she entered a bus, and when she was on the street, she gave a new and longer look at her fellow pedestrians. But she met no bright eyes regarding her from above a square chin. Now, vaguely disturbed by the stare of the strange woman, she carefully avoided encountering the eyes of those about her. She remembered with a blush that she had consulted the telephone book for the

number of the Touraine Restaurant, and had dreamed of going there some evening for dinner. It was a prospect, she knew as she dreamed, not likely to be realized unless some miracle should bring her riches.

At Fifty-Seventh Street the rain was descending in torrents and she ran as fast as she could to the door of the Misses Brandon. Mr. Jay's shade was drawn; he had retired to his domestic quarters at the rear; Miss La Rue and Miss Gracey were putting the beauty shop in order. Miss La Rue had taken on another assistant whose work was not satisfactory.

'If I didn't work any harder than she does, I'd soon be on the town,' said Miss La Rue. 'Some people think they can get away with anything.'

Climbing the next flight, Lila heard loud and familiar tones.

'I've written a new advertisement to put into the paper,' roared Miss Berenice pleasantly, from her chair by the front window.

'We'll do no advertising,' retorted Miss Rachel in a shriek from the distant kitchen.

'None. It's throwing good money away. Write your advertisement, but I shall not put it in. I shall tear it up with a loud ripping sound and throw it into the scrap-basket.'

Lila turned on the light which enabled her to find her way to the fourth story.

'Is that you, Miss Tryon?' asked Miss Berenice. 'Are you home?'

Entering the door of the Brandons' parlor, Lila laid ten dollars on the table. Miss Berenice's wig was low upon her forehead; she had now not an imposing but a strange and savage look.

'Did you bring books for me?'

'Indeed I did! I have some in this parcel.'

As Lila went up to her room, Berenice continued to address her.

'It's going to clear.'

'It's not going to clear,' declared Miss Rachel shrilly from afar.

As if to prove Miss Rachel right, the rain descended again with its thunderous sound. Lila felt moisture on her face — a fine mist was coming through the skylight. She opened the door into her room and turned on the

light — what a curiosity shop! She sat down just inside the door. The what-not seemed like a strange stunted tree, the legs of the chairs which were turned upside down upon their fellows resembled the feelers of an octopus. She had ceased to take dinner outside her own room, and her little table was set with a white cloth and a plate and cup and saucer — they at least had a friendly look.

'My assets are few,' said she. 'No property except clothes which I need to cover me, and books and a desk and a table and three chairs and a bed and bureau in storage, which I probably couldn't sell. Five cents' worth of green glass beads.' She laid her hand on the string of imitation pearls. 'My gold beads can go if they must, but not these!' As though figures were flashed on a curtain by a magic lantern, there appeared a clear statement. Twenty dollars remaining in her purse from this week's wages, fifteen from last week's, then only twenty dollars till the middle of August!

'But when things seem most desperate, they clear up,' said she in quotation of Miss

King's cheerful words, and rising set about making her coffee. 'To-morrow I'll take a walk and read and visit the Museum. Sunday I'll go to church. Monday I'll start out early, and it may be that before the Misses Brandon suspect that I'm laid off at Wickerham and Carter's, I'll have a new position. At present' — Lila laughed a nervous laugh — 'at present I'm on the town.'

In a moment she laughed again and quickly checked herself. Beneath her surface composure lay depths of terror. She began to rub her hands together, and again she laughed.

'Stop it!' she said sternly, and set about getting her dinner.

CHAPTER VII

A NEW LODGER

LILA stepped through the doorway of Rosier and Britton's Department Store. It was the morning of Saturday the fourteenth of June, and her appearance was changed from that which she had presented on the evening of May the twenty-ninth. Her face was paler and her body somewhat more slender. There were other small differences; she was wearing her gold beads instead of her imitation pearls, and if one had been able to compare the sole of her shoe with the same shoe worn two weeks earlier, one would have observed a considerable loss of thickness.

No pearly haze dimmed the brightness of the blue heavens; and nothing dimmed the heat which had leaped suddenly to the temperature of July. As the pedestrians had fled from the shower to the inner edge of the pavement, so they fled now from the burning sunshine. Men were walking without coats, and,

except Lila, all the women seemed to have put on thin, bright dresses.

Lila had had a theory about department stores, which she had, alas! proved mistaken — she believed that those who shop there go less commonly to the mountains or seashore, and that remaining in the city, they continue to buy books. Therefore, since their own employees had vacations, department stores would need extra help, and a clerk from Wickerham and Carter's with a glowing letter of recommendation from Mr. Nunnelly might succeed in finding a temporary place. Lila had made a list of ten stores which, one by one, she had visited, Rosier and Britton now alone remaining.

Except that she had not been engaged, her experience had been on the whole not unpleasant. She knew that those persons who believe the city to be a jungle filled with wild beasts consider no enterprise so dangerous as the search for a position on the part of a young girl, who risks kidnaping as the least of many perils. Occasionally when other reading matter was lacking, she read a syn-

dicated story in a newspaper and frequently a girl in her own position was the heroine. Her experience, however, was very different from that of the girls in the stories. No one said to her, 'Hello, sister!' when she entered an office, or, 'Sorry, girlie, you'll have to beat it!' when she departed; no handsome and designing man followed her out or invited her to dinner and the theater.

She encountered only politeness, indeed a polished and formal politeness. She was usually interviewed by serious young men, or by women approaching middle age who listened to her with kindness and apparently regretted sincerely their inability to engage her services. She anticipated the same sort of treatment at Rosier and Britton's, and alas! the same conclusion.

Entering the store, she passed down the aisle between counters filled with perfumes, unguents, powders, liquids, and all the other materials used in the trade of Miss Blanche La Rue. Having consulted the directory, she signaled the elevator marked 'Express to Tenth Floor. Offices Only.'

In the elevator she stooped to investigate the cause of acute discomfort in her foot and discovered that a small stone had worked its way through the sole. Rising from her stooping posture, she caught sight of a frowning face in the mirror and was startled to find that it was her own. Before she stooped, she remembered that she had applied to her shoes the last drop of blacking in the bottle; now she realized with dismay that they would need a more radical repairing than could be given by polishing. This was, however, not the moment to reflect upon her worn shoes; she smoothed the frown from her brow and deliberately looked pleasant. Bending had brought color to her cheek; she showed again the possibility of prettiness and even of beauty.

'Employment bureau,' said she to the girl who ran the elevator.

'To the right.' Did the girl look at her pityingly?

The head of this employment bureau was a woman of perhaps forty, beautifully and plainly dressed and seated in an office as

plain as her clothes, and also as elegant. While she concluded a telephone conversation, Lila looked about, wondering whether overdressed applicants were impressed and improved by the aspect of the room and its mistress. On the desk on a little stand was her name, 'Miss Lawlor,' in gold letters on a black ground. Having asked for Lila's business and read Mr. Nunnelly's recommendation, she listened to what Lila had to say; then she shook her head.

'I'm sorry, Miss Tryon, but we have no place for you. We should like to employ you; you have the sort of knowledge and experience which we wish those in our book department to have and which we seldom find, and you love books. But there's simply no vacancy. I shall file your name and address and if we have anything to offer, I'll let you know at once. Are you by any chance related to Horace Tryon?'

Lila could not answer for a moment because of her tears. 'I'm Horace Tryon's daughter.'

'Some years ago he and I worked for the

same publishers,' said Miss Lawlor. 'I used to see him now and then. I wish you'd have lunch with me to-day. Is there any reason why you can't?'

'No,' answered Lila. 'None.'

'Then we'll go to the dining-room now before the crowd arrives. I hope you're as hungry as I am.'

'I am hungry,' confessed Lila.

Her appetite in process of satisfaction and her heart warmed, Lila felt her spirits rise. Miss Lawlor congratulated her upon having been reëngaged by Wickerham and Carter, whom she said required loyalty and hard work, but who were very kind. She wrote upon the menu a list of stores where books alone were sold and where she thought Lila might have a chance of success, and at parting she bade her think of her as a friend.

'I wouldn't make application this afternoon,' she advised. 'Saturday's not a good time for business. Start in on Monday.'

Reminded of the condition of her shoe by the entrance of another stone, and recalling the sign of a shoemaker seen as she entered

Rosier and Britton's, Lila sought a little shop, filling the space once devoted to a doorway and only about eight feet wide. Over the door was a sign, 'Yes, this is Tony's,' and on a shoemaker's bench sat Tony, a small Italian, tapping away at the sole of a shoe.

'Hello!' said he cheerfully. 'Well, what you got?'

Lila held up her foot. 'What will you charge to fix that?'

'Gee!' he exclaimed. 'Bad! Two dollars and a quarter.'

'I couldn't pay that much!' Lila laughed; the price, compared with her resources, was an absurdity. The man looked at her so pleasantly that question and answer both seemed to be jokes. Her gray eyes danced, her cheeks reddened, and Tony's glance became one of admiration.

'How much you pay?'

'A dollar.'

'I got a little brother,' said Tony. 'Far west on Forty-Fif'. He gotta no high rent like me. You go to him.'

'What's his name?'

'Tony. Italians gotta no name but Tony. You go there. He fix you up right away, good and cheap.'

Across the street was a jewelry store of respectable aspect.

'I don't have to sell my gold beads yet,' said Lila. Nevertheless, she crossed over and entered the store.

'Will you kindly tell me how much these beads are worth?'

The clerk took up a magnifying glass, then he weighed the necklace in his hand. 'Perhaps forty dollars, Miss — a little more or a little less.'

'Thank you.' Lila clasped the beads once more round her neck. Suddenly her cheeks turned a fiery red — one could make money from jewelry and later get the jewelry back.

'I can manage for two weeks longer,' said she. 'Perhaps by then I shall have work. If not, I'll not sell my gold beads — I'll pawn them.'

She walked slowly up Fifth Avenue. Her feet were becoming calloused and the process was painful. At Wickerham and Carter's she

went in. The clerks spoke to her pleasantly, and Miss King's face lighted with heartfelt welcome. The children's room with its easy-chairs and plants was a paradise. Miss King had brought flowers in from her sister's garden, blue delphiniums, shell-pink sweet Williams, and pale yellow stock.

'Sit down!' said she. 'How are you?'

'I'm well,' answered Lila bravely.

'Your head still above water?'

'Yes.'

'Far enough for safety?'

'Oh, yes!'

'Miss Tryon ——' Miss King and Lila both looked round. Miss Fowler from the modern novel department inside the entrance stood in the doorway. She looked back over her shoulder watching for customers, then toward Lila, then back over her shoulder. 'Did a strange-looking woman come to see you?'

'No — what woman?'

'A rather handsome person, all in black. She described you and said she'd seen you leaving the store one evening and had tried to

catch up with you, but couldn't. She said she had important business with you. I thought perhaps something pleasant was turning up, a fairy godmother or something, so I gave her your address; that is, I told her the street and guessed at the number. Fifty-Sixth Street, isn't it?'

'Fifty-Seventh.' Lila was startled. 'Was she a woman with a very white face?'

'Yes. She didn't look healthy.'

'With quite perfect features, and a sort of foreign look?'

'You might describe her that way.'

'I believe she was standing at the window when I went out the evening before Memorial Day. When was she here?'

'She was here — let me see — last week, I believe it was. No, it was earlier. I don't remember exactly.'

'What could she want with me?' asked Lila in a troubled voice.

'Sure you don't know her?'

'Sure! I never saw her until then. You say you gave her my address?'

'Not quite — I said Fifty-Sixth Street.

Perhaps it's just as well I made a mistake. I hope I haven't done anything wrong.'

'Oh, no!' said Lila, rising to go. 'She can't do me any harm, and she evidently doesn't intend to do me any good.'

'Don't forget to come in on the first of July for your check,' Miss King reminded her. 'Take all the books you want, and remember you have friends here.'

Loath as she was to leave the pleasant shelter of the store, Lila set out for Fifty-Seventh Street. She had many blocks to go, and not only did her feet burn, but her whole body ached, thrown from its correct position as it was by her effort to avoid pressing on the callous spots. She looked down a street — there was one of the bookstores recommended by Miss Lawlor; down the next, there was another. Their number, which had seemed encouraging, appalled her; she saw herself at the end of another week, having visited them all in vain.

At Saint Thomas's Church she paused and entering sat for a long time in a pew. The air was cool, the light stained with color. By and

by the organist began to play and tears came to her eyes. She made up her mind that in the morning she would go to church. Often she was too tired, but she did wrong to deprive her spirit of nourishment because her body was weak.

The afternoon light had not begun to fade when she turned at last into Fifty-Seventh Street. But it was five o'clock and business places were closed. In the house of the Misses Brandon, Mr. Jay had closed his doors and only sweet odors remained to indicate that Miss Blanche La Rue had occupied for many hours the quiet and shining second floor. Above-stairs the skylight, a good deal dimmed by smoke and dust, let in a faint glow. As she climbed on, grateful for the thick carpet which covered the second flight, Lila heard the voices of Rachel and Berenice.

'She's a nice woman!' said Berenice in her loud rumble.

'Don't you trust her!' shrieked Rachel. 'Don't like her looks. Too smooth. Mean to keep my eye on her and lock everything up.'

'She pays well.'

'Not too well. It was silly not to ask her double.'

The head of Lila appeared within the area of vision of the sisters. She walked forward and handed Rachel ten dollars, growing a little pale as she did so.

'Young lady, we've got a lodger!' announced Berenice excitedly. 'A handsome woman. I got her myself through an advertisement I wrote for the paper.'

'You did not!' shrieked Rachel. 'I got her through the window sign. Your advertisement never saw the paper; it went into the scrap-basket.'

'Where is she?' asked Lila, regarding the upper stairway with a startled eye.

'She's gone out to get her dinner.' Berenice saw Lila's upward glance, though she did not hear her voice. 'Her name's Mrs. Cooper; that's a good name.'

'Mrs. Snooper, more likely,' corrected Rachel. 'Keep your door locked, Miss Tryon; that's my advice.'

Hearing the outer door close far below her, Lila looked down. Presently there appeared

on the second flight a black-clad figure with a strange yet familiar look. Mrs. Cooper was not dressed elegantly; in fact, she was dressed very poorly, in a down-at-heel fashion. As she started on the second flight, she lifted her head — she had a very white skin, to which rouge had been liberally applied, very black eyes and brows; she was like, yet unlike, the woman who had stood outside the door of Wickerham and Carter's store. That woman had looked like a faded but once distinguished actress — this woman looked like a faded actress made up for a part.

Lila went rapidly on her way, forgetting her aching body and her weary feet. She stepped into her room, where the temperature was stifling, and closed the door and stood with her fingers pressed to her lips.

'Who is she?' said she to herself. 'If it's the same woman, what on earth does she want with me?'

For the first time she thought of the city as a jungle in which unkindly creatures prowled.

Presently she went about preparing her supper. She heated soup from a can, made

the inevitable toast, and ate a few pieces of sweet chocolate. She loved to keep house and she was an experienced cook, but with one gas burner and no one to cook for, she had neither the facilities nor the ambition to prepare tasty dishes.

When she had finished, she lay down on the bed with a book in her hand. In a few minutes she was asleep, having heard no sound either from the Misses Brandon or from their strange new lodger, Mrs. Cooper.

CHAPTER VIII

LILA IS SAFE FOR ANOTHER WEEK

LILA walked west on Forty-Fifth Street on the morning of Saturday, June twenty-eighth, her eyes searching for the shop of Tony Number Two. One hand held tightly her umbrella and her purse in which were two dollar bills, the sum of her cash possessions. Beneath her arm was a parcel containing the more worn of her two pairs of shoes, the less worn being on her feet. In the sole of these also was now a small hole. Every few minutes her free hand touched the heavy gold beads under her black dress.

'With these I'm safe,' she said to herself. She touched also, with another emotion, the imitation pearl beads on the outside of her dress. 'These I cannot give up.'

The day was dull and the air heavy. She ascribed her feeling of weakness to the humidity and high temperature, but it was due in part to a continuous diet of crackers and fruit. She would have to pay the Misses

Brandon ten dollars before she slept, but she had hopes of an event which might enable her to postpone the sale or pawning of her gold beads. She would call at Wickerham and Carter's, and though June was not quite over they might give her her ten dollars.

The pavement was crowded with pedestrians and the street with trucks and cars. Here and there a horse-drawn dray obstructed traffic, the ponderous and faithful animals standing in the confusion unmoved, except by flies at which they twitched their ears and switched their tails. Once, catching sight of a small wistful-looking creature in a mirror, Lila stopped short — was it some one she knew? Having recognized herself, she smiled and went on.

Under the elevated road on Sixth Avenue she waited until the policeman had twice sounded his whistle for her to proceed. Accustomed though she was to traffic and traveling with no consciousness of danger or thought of precautions, she was suddenly confused. Near Eighth Avenue she saw a familiar sign, 'Yes, this is Tony's,' before a

tiny shop. In quarters even more narrow than those of the Tony to the east sat a shoemaker, sewing on a patch with spreading motions of his arms.

'Hello!' said he cheerfully.

Lila explained her errand. 'Your brother told me if I came here you'd sole my shoes without charging me as much as he charges. You see how badly they need it.'

'You're sure right,' answered Tony with a ready laugh. 'Those shoes you got on, they need the doctor too.'

'How much?' asked Lila.

Tony looked at her critically.

'I'm soon finished. You sit down. Take off your shoes. I menda da best first.'

Lila sat down heavily on a chair opposite the low bench. She opened her parcel and slipped off the shoes she was wearing.

'You walk much,' commented Tony.

'Yes.' His friendliness tempted her to confidence; the words seemed to utter themselves. 'I'm hunting a job.'

'So?' Tony resumed his sewing. 'What can you do? Waiter? Beauty shop?'

'I work in a bookstore,' explained Lila. 'I'm laid off just now, because people don't buy many books in summer.'

'I guess you read and write?'

'Oh, yes!'

'You write good?'

'That depends on what you mean by "good."'

Tony's next remark startled Lila almost out of her wits. 'You pretty girl,' said he. 'You sure gotta fine beau?'

'No, I haven't!' she answered. 'Too busy for beaux.'

'If you had a beau, you sure often write him letters?'

'I suppose so.'

'Sweet letters?'

'I'd try my best,' laughed Lila.

'Now, listen' — Tony said 'lissen' as though New York had always been his home — 'I gotta fine girl.'

Lila laughed again. 'I'm sure you have!'

'She's far, far away. Chicago. She American. She visit her cross aunt. You write her nice American letters and I fix your shoes. Bargain?'

'I'll do it for nothing,' said Lila. 'I'll write you two or three letters.'

Tony shook his head. 'These shoes I patch while you wait. I tell you what to say. Then you go home. Next week you come back with the letter; then these, too, have good soles. See?'

'I see,' said Lila. 'Now what do you want me to say?'

Tony was frank. 'Tell her one, two, three, four ways I love her.' From under his bench he drew out a box of stationery; the paper was pink, the envelopes were pink lined with gold; both were scented with carnation sachet. 'Fine paper! Twenty-five cents for the box.'

'I'll write the letter out carefully and then copy it, so there'll be no mistakes. I'll tell her you miss her and you can hardly wait to see her.'

'Good!' approved Tony. 'Datta da stuff.'

'Are you going out to visit her?'

'No, she come home. September. Then we get married.'

'All right,' said Lila. 'Shall I send a message to the aunt?'

Tony lifted his head and ceased his rapid tapping on the sole of Lila's shoe. 'You tella de aunt I hope she choke on hot potata,' said he, his eyes gleaming. 'She 'gainst me, don' like me. Call me Dago.'

'You must give me your lady's name or I can't address the envelope.'

Tony glibly recited a name and address. 'Daisy is a nice name — you think so?'

'I do.' The shoe was finished and Lila put it on. 'On Monday I'll be here.'

Lila stepped out to the pavement — to her surprise rain was falling. In panic she stopped short, she had lost something — what was it? It was something vitally necessary to her comfort. As she stood still in distress and bewilderment she heard a loud 'Hi!' Behind her Tony was holding out an umbrella.

'Oh, thank you!' she gasped. She could not buy a new umbrella, that was certain.

Heartened by the kindness of Tony and walking comfortably, she felt less depressed. On dreary days like this one's spirits sank without cause; she would make a special effort to be cheerful. In one matter her mind

was relieved; she had convinced herself that the woman who had looked at her so sharply and who had asked her address was not the Mrs. Cooper who lodged on the same floor with her. Mrs. Cooper stayed in her room for hours at a time, or was out of the house for half a day. She avoided encountering Lila in the hall, and Lila was willing to be avoided. She overheard the Brandons discussing Mrs. Cooper's strange behavior.

'She has a position,' roared Berenice in her positive way.

'Position nothing!' rejoined Rachel. 'She's as irregular as a goat.'

Lila smiled — the animal world furnished Rachel with many comparisons.

'She doesn't look well to me,' remarked Berenice.

'Drugs!' shrieked Rachel. 'Dope!'

'I hope we may keep her a long time,' said Berenice. 'I don't like change.'

'I hope we may find another tenant quickly so that we can ask her to leave.' Rachel spoke in such a vindictive tone that Lila felt pity for Mrs. Cooper. 'I expect her to get us

into some serious trouble. We might easily be comfortable and happy, and I wouldn't be wearing my life out, if you weren't as stubborn' — Rachel's voice rose, she used a new term of comparison — 'as stubborn as a zebra.'

Again as she walked along, Lila lifted her free hand to her neck. The gold beads were in their place beneath the pearl beads and her dress; it was comforting to feel them. All the week she had been visiting stores which sold only books; all suffered as did Wickerham and Carter from diminished trade in summer.

'If I could only have had a little money ahead!' She uttered again her ardent wish. 'But I couldn't — that's all. I did my best.' Again she lifted her hand. 'If they don't give me the ten dollars, I'll have to pawn my beads before I go home!'

Stumbling on the step she reached the large bookstore of Farrar and Johns on Fiftieth Street. As in most stores on a morning which promised from sunrise to be bad, there were few customers. Instead of walking toward the office at the rear, she halted at the

nearest counter and addressed a tall man standing with his back to her. He was examining the books on the shelves, apparently searching for a title.

'May I speak to you for a minute?' To her distress she found it necessary to support herself against the counter.

The man turned abruptly and faced her; he was not, she believed, a clerk, but some one in a higher position.

'What is it, madam?'

His address was so sharp, his gaze so keen, that Lila was confused and frightened.

'I've been a clerk in a bookstore, and I've been laid off for the summer. I was at Wickerham and Carter's. I' — the man's sharp blue eyes were fixed even more intently upon her, but he did not seem to be paying heed to what she was saying — 'I have a recommendation from the manager. I thought ——'

'We have nothing for you.'

'I — my name ——' Speaking incoherently, Lila moved backward toward the door. Her face flushed, she was not used to being spoken to in this rude fashion. The stranger's eyes

seemed to pierce through her, through her dress, to her golden beads. Frightened, she turned and almost ran out the door.

'Wait a minute!' ordered the man. 'I tell you to wait!'

Losing all common-sense in her alarm, she believed that he was about to pursue her. Before him two courses were open, either he could leap the counter or he could go back to an opening. For an instant he hesitated, as if considering his own dignity or measuring his agility; then he took the latter course. Instantly Lila stepped swiftly out the door and round the corner. She believed that he called 'Stop!' but she did not linger to be certain. Hurrying on southward, she put three blocks between herself and him before she paused to draw breath. She passed the Touraine, but the Touraine and a bright-eyed young man with a square chin had ceased to have any importance. Here was an arcade between two buildings — she slipped into it, entered a store, and came out by an exit on another street. Suddenly everything grew black before her eyes; but happily at the same instant

the heartening odor of coffee from a near-by restaurant scented the air.

'Ah!' she gasped. 'That's what I need!'

Entering she ordered a cup of coffee. Tears dropped into the hot liquid. 'Now I'm seeing things again!' said she. 'I'll go talk to Miss King. I won't encounter the eyes of a living soul. Nobody wants to do me any harm.'

Her resolution was more easily made than kept. Halting with the crowd while the traffic signal changed, she glanced to one side. A short stout man whose eyes were not far above the level of her own was looking at her intently. When the signal changed, he still kept beside her.

'Now,' said she, 'I'm getting to be like the vain and silly girls who flatter themselves that they're being followed.'

A taller man advancing hailed the short man and for an instant took his attention. Again the signal changed; rushing ahead, she crossed the street. The two men remained back of the procession of automobiles. Wickerham and Carter's was at hand; she entered

and walked back through the store to the department of Miss King. In Miss King's comfortable society her troubles seemed a cause for amusement.

'I don't suppose you ever thought people were following you?'

'I used to when I first came to the city,' confessed Miss King. 'I got over it, though, very quickly. I used to think people were staring rudely at me, but I discovered it was I staring rudely at them. I hoped you'd come in to-day and I brought extra lunch. How are you getting along?'

'All right so far,' said Lila bravely. 'I've been to about a hundred bookstores in vain, but I haven't had to sell anything.'

'No luck at all?'

'None.'

'Would you like to get your ten dollars from the cashier?'

'Ten dollars would see me through till next Saturday.'

Miss Graham put the precious slip into her hand, she endorsed it, and received ten crisp dollar bills.

'You'll be back with us before long,' said Miss Graham pleasantly.

'I have some new books for you,' said Miss King, as they ate their lunch. 'Some for you and some for your old ladies.'

This, too, was cheering. Lila had not told the Brandon sisters that she was out of work, but she believed that they were growing suspicious. She related her experience with the two Tonys, and Miss King laughed.

'You have the narrative gift,' said she. 'I brought a parcel for you to take home. Here's a glass of jelly and here are some of my sister's cookies. She sent them. It will be a lunch before you go to bed.'

'It will be a whole meal,' said Lila in her heart.

Carrying her books, her umbrella, her parcel, and Tony's letter-paper, she started up Fifth Avenue. The way was long, the air grew heavier, the show-windows had no charm. She walked slowly, both because she did not wish to reach home too soon and because she was utterly worn out.

She held her handbag tightly. 'I ought to

lose it to complete the picture, but that I don't propose to do! Till next Saturday, I'm safe.'

Suddenly her face brightened — a plan for earning a little money occurred to her. She walked more briskly, not pausing until she had entered the door and had passed through odors of steaming cloth and of cooking in the layer scented by Mr. Jay, into the layer more delicately scented by Miss Blanche La Rue. Miss La Rue's last customer was departing and she was putting on her hat. She hummed a tune, and turned her head, still humming.

'Yes, dearie!'

'My name is Lila Tryon and I have a room upstairs.'

Miss La Rue touched her lips with red.

'Yes,' said she sweetly. 'I've seen you often.'

'I work in a bookstore, and they've laid me off till the middle of August. I wondered if you could give me anything to do?'

'Many girls are laid off in summer. Are you trained in beauty work?'

'No.'

'Then I have nothing, dearie, except something that's below your style.'

'What's that?'

'Cleaning up. My girls won't do it — they're too proud, and my charwoman has gone back on me. If you come in every evening when I go and put things in order, I'll give you fifty cents per day.'

'I'll do that,' consented Lila eagerly. 'I'm not too proud.'

'I've seen you coming and going at good hours, else I wouldn't take you. I don't take everybody on sight, believe me! Here are the keys. You can do it this evening or on Sunday or on Monday morning, I don't care which, just so it's done Monday at nine.'

'It will be done,' promised Lila.

Lila ascended slowly to the rooms of the Misses Brandon. The customary duet quieted as she drew near. She approached Miss Berenice — it was wisest, she thought, to explain her situation.

'Sit down,' invited Miss Berenice.

Rachel sat down also, her eyes upon Lila's purse. She looked at it hungrily, not greedily,

but with a sort of desperation — Rachel's lot was hard.

'Here's my rent for next week.' Lila handed out ten dollars. 'Here are a number of interesting books. I'm laid off until the middle of August, but I'm receiving part pay.'

Rachel leaned forward, her face growing pale.

'I'm receiving part pay,' repeated Lila again in a still louder shout. 'I'm also going to work for Miss La Rue downstairs.'

'What are you going to do for Miss La Rue?' asked Miss Rachel.

'I'm going to clean up each day when she's gone.'

Berenice listened and nodded her head; Rachel frowned and said no more. Lila rose and went upstairs.

'Very praiseworthy!' roared Berenice.

'We shall see,' said Rachel in an uncertain tone.

'Don't worry!' said Lila in her mind. 'I still have my gold beads.'

Hearing a door creak, she stopped short.

She had also seen a shadow; connecting it with the creaking door, she knew that Mrs. Cooper had moved across the hall. Could she have been in her room? But the door was locked as she had left it.

'Still being followed, are you?' she said to herself mockingly.

She opened the one window which was movable and closed her door and sat down with a sigh. Homely and cluttered as the room was, it was a precious haven, in which she was secure for another week. She believed that Miss La Rue would pay her daily. She would do the work on Monday morning and be leaving as Miss La Rue arrived. Perhaps she could give her something else to do.

'But I shall have to pawn my gold beads,' said she.

Removing her jewels, both gold and imitation pearl, she looked at them tearfully; then she undressed and bathed and lay down on her bed. The air was heavy—with the other room occupied there could be no cross-ventilation.

'After awhile I'll eat some cookies and jelly, then I'll go to sleep and not get up till

toward noon, then I'll go out for lunch, then to the Metropolitan Museum, then I'll sleep, then I'll do Miss La Rue's work.' Sniffing carnation scent, she laughed. 'I'll write Tony's letter.'

Rising, she assured Miss Daisy McCann of Tony's undying affection and of his longing for her return. She wrote ardently, copied her composition carefully, and was satisfied with her eloquence. Drowsily she put out the light and lay down once more.

But she could not sleep; something seemed to jerk her heavy eyelids awake. She found that she was listening nervously for sounds in the hall. She examined the door — it was securely locked. Irritated with herself she placed a chair under the knob so that the door could not be opened without commotion; then at last she fell asleep.

In the hot and humid night she dreamed again. Now she was pursuing a stranger from street to street, sometimes on foot, sometimes on the top of a bus from which she had difficulty in descending as he vanished round a corner. He was now short, now tall, now

fat, now thin, now a friend, now an enemy who had robbed her of a precious possession. Whether friend or enemy, he always had black and glittering eyes and a sarcastic smile to which several gold teeth lent a brighter gleam. Her chase became at last a mad race which ended outside the door of the Touraine Restaurant, where a porter welcomed her quarry and barred her out.

When she woke the sun was high in the sky. She lay listening drowsily to the sounds from without, then she took her watch from under her pillow. It was ten o'clock! She was for a moment dismayed; then she said 'Good!' She felt revived and refreshed and not so hungry that the remaining cookies could not stay her until noon at least. She sat up and swung her feet over the edge of the bed. As she was putting on her slippers, her glance was caught and held.

It was her business to keep her room in order, and twice a week she was accustomed to mop the floor with Miss Rachel's mop. This she had done on Wednesday evening, and since that time she had not opened her

trunk or been near it. But in the thin layer of dust before it were footprints. No single print was distinct; they might have been made by either a large or a small foot. All pointed toward the trunk and indicated that their owner had several times shifted his position as one might in bending over to lift a lid or to close it, or to examine the contents of the trunk.

She stood for several minutes frowning meditatively. Had Mrs. Cooper really paid her room a visit? She would find nothing to steal. Was it Miss Rachel? She had clearly been anxious — did she think that Lila meant to depart, carrying loot with her? Shrugging her shoulders, she proceeded with her dressing.

'Let them pry!' said she defiantly. She walked to the window — the sun was bright, the air was cool, she was young. She thought with satisfaction of Miss La Rue's fifty cents a day. Perhaps Mr. Jay — she blushed, then lifted her head with a bitter pride — perhaps Mr. Jay would need some one to mind the store while he ate his dinner or went on er-

rands. He put a sign on his door — 'Back in a half-hour' and he must sometimes lose customers.

'But I'll have to pawn my gold beads,' said she. 'That I'll certainly have to do.' To-day she put them over her dress and her pearls beneath. She felt nervous and excited. 'There's one thing certain—nobody'll steal them here if I'm away and have them round my neck!'

As she sat down at her little table to eat her breakfast, she looked with tearful eyes at her plate and cup and saucer. It was not a new experience — sometimes she wished that she had not brought these dear and familiar objects with her. The sight of them reminded her of her other possessions stored in the basement of the apartment house where she and her father had lived so long. The charge for keeping them was six dollars a month. Through Miss Dorrance's kindness they were safe until the first of August. The janitor was kind, but he was responsible to the owners of the building for all the profit he could get. If six dollars had been six thousand, Lila could have been no more disturbed.

CHAPTER IX

LILA STUDIES STRANGE FISHES

It was the middle of Sunday afternoon, July fourteenth, and Lila sat on a comfortable upholstered bench in a dark corner in the Natural History Museum. Before her in dimly lighted tanks seemed to float strange creatures of the sea; in reality they were supported by invisible wires. The creatures were really impossible; some resembled rolled umbrellas, some firemen's helmets. There was no light whatever in the corner except that which illuminated the under-sea view, and there was little ventilation.

Lila leaned her head back against the wall and closed her eyes. After a long time her head fell forward and she woke with a start, believing that she had dislocated a vertebra, a notion which she found at once to be mistaken.

Automatically she put her hand to her neck; then she remembered that her golden beads were gone. She had not sold them, but

had pawned them and had received thirty dollars. She had earned three dollars, when Miss La Rue's charwoman returned, insisting that she had been ill and not negligent, and Miss La Rue had ruefully taken her on.

'Next time she fails me, girlie, you get the job for keeps.'

Miss La Rue proposed that Lila abandon her selling of books and learn some branch of the beauty business.

'Folks can get on without reading,' she declared. 'But women won't get on without looking as well as possible.'

Lila shook her head smilingly. 'I think I'd be more of a success as a bookseller.'

'I could show you some good times,' promised Miss La Rue. 'It's a pity for a good-looking girl like you to live so retired.'

'I'll have my turn,' said Lila hopefully.

'Well, don't wait till you're dead, is what I advise,' said Miss La Rue.

Mr. Jay had no work to offer; he explained that he had risen to where he was by doing his work himself, and that he proposed to continue. Miss Rachel had made it very clear

that there could be no postponement of payment — that, indeed, Lila could see for herself.

'Soon we'll have nothing left,' said Rachel in a moment of confidence. 'My sister will not leave this house, and she will not sign the papers, and she will not be carried out. You can understand that I must have your rent, Miss Tryon.'

Rachel was sharp, the pawnbroker had been gruff. When Lila called on Miss King, from whom she hoped to receive sympathy and encouragement, she found her worried about her sister who was to have an operation from which her recovery was likely to be slow. Miss King used an expression frequently used by Lila herself.

'I used to say, "If only I had a little ahead!" Now I say, "If only nothing happens!"'

Sitting in her dark corner, Lila began to count on her fingers. 'I had two dollars over, and then three dollars from Miss La Rue, and then thirty dollars from my beads. That's thirty-five. Then I paid twenty dollars to

Miss Rachel — that leaves fifteen; and I must have spent seven for food in two weeks — that leaves eight. If I pawn my pearl beads, I may get twenty, and that will see me through till August first when I get ten. Perhaps I can manage. But I must pawn my pearl beads. But not to-morrow.' She lifted her hand and touched them — 'Not to-morrow!'

Alarmed, she realized that she had said these words aloud. An attendant walked past — had he heard her? 'They'll think it strange if I sit here so long!' She moved away from the dim neighborhood of strange fishes to another gallery and the neighborhood of strange birds. Here the light was bright as day; on a beach surrounded by a rank growth of grass, uncanny pelicans seemed just to have paused in their strange waddling progress and to be standing in meditation. Others contemplated their nests, or fed their young with every appearance of choking them to death.

Sitting down on another upholstered couch, she fingered her imitation pearls. 'I'll not

pawn them. I'll take them back to Brinley, Barton, and Stark and I'll explain. They're good as new. They might buy them from me, and' — a sudden hope brightened her eyes — 'by and by, if they hadn't sold them, they might let me buy them back!' She began again her oft-repeated calculation. 'I had two dollars over and I earned three dollars, and' — she started again, having lost her count.

Her mind wandered vaguely to her room, then to Mrs. Cooper who still came and went quietly. She had decided that she had omitted her Wednesday mopping of the floor or that she had left the door open and that Mrs. Cooper had wandered in. The trunk stood under a window; some one might easily go there to look out, though the window could not be lifted. Miss Rachel seemed to have forgotten her suspicions of Mrs. Cooper's character.

Lila observed suddenly that all the people were moving in one direction. The gong for closing had not sounded, but the general approach toward the door had begun, as though

the possibility of being shut in were not to be endured. Lila had a fantastic thought — if one had no place to stay, might it not be possible to sleep on one of the upholstered couches in the fishes' dark corner?

Smiling at herself, she walked slowly down the stairs. She was afraid to ride in the elevator; when one had eaten too little, the downward motion gave one very queer feelings. In the wide entrance lobby, she stood idly contemplating the masses of meteoric iron which had fallen so mysteriously from the sky. She looked up — a man was standing close beside her, his general appearance fatherly. His eyes, however, had no fatherly expression, but a bright gleam as of a hunter who sees a sudden and unexpected quarry.

'It wouldn't be comfortable to have one of those pebbles hit you, would it?' said he, moving close to Lila.

Lila answered with an involuntary 'No, indeed!' and moved instantly away. The man took a long step and kept by her side. Lila quickened her sidewise pace, he lengthened his.

'Daylight saving is a fine thing in the city,' he remarked as he put out his hand to push the revolving door. Lila had already stepped in; he entered the next compartment. Lila took an enforced step, another. Bewildered and alarmed, she took still another and found herself back in the lobby. She looked over her shoulder, the stranger was outside. She believed he was preparing either to wait or to reënter the door and join her. In wild, unreasoning terror, she fled across the lobby to the information desk where a young woman was putting on her hat.

'Will you help me get away?' she gasped. 'A strange man has spoken to me and I'm afraid of him.'

'Surely! Step inside that door.' Obeying the girl's directing finger, Lila entered a doorway marked 'private.' Glancing back at the outer door, she saw the stranger enter the lobby and look about. A guard spoke to him and he turned and went out.

'That tall old bird?' asked the young woman disrespectfully.

'Yes. He spoke to me several times. He

may be all right, but he doesn't know me, nor I him.'

The young woman strolled across to the door, used the glass for a mirror, and returned, adjusting her hat.

'He's still there,' said she. 'You come with me. I'll take you out the employees' exit and you can step right into the Elevated. You look faint.'

'I'm all right,' said Lila. 'I'm greatly obliged to you.'

With the bulk of the vast building to shelter her, Lila began to breathe freely; indeed, she began to wonder whether once more a frightened imagination had not deceived her. The man was old enough to be her father, perhaps her grandfather, and he had spoken to her in a friendly way. So certain was she that his sinister intention was a product of her imagination that she decided not to enter the Elevated, but to go on her way on foot. She would encircle the building, leave the grounds at the far corner, and, stopping at the first drug-store or restaurant, buy a cup of coffee. Her thoughts returned to her financial assets.

'WHY ARE YOU AFRAID OF ME, LITTLE GIRL?' INQUIRED A SUAVE VOICE

'Five dollars will last till Saturday,' said she, again speaking aloud.

The bright light of sunset banished her fears. Her head a little bent, she walked on. Suddenly her way was obstructed.

'Why are you afraid of me, little girl?' inquired a suave voice far above her.

She looked up — the same tall stranger was smiling down. His smile was unmistakably evil.

'I'm not afraid of you,' she answered indignantly. 'But I don't wish you to speak to me.'

She walked still more briskly and the stranger again quickened his pace. It seemed to her that he reached his hand toward her, and with a cry, she began to run. She was not running aimlessly, her goal was a stout blue-coated figure. Seeing her, the officer came rapidly toward her.

'A man insists on speaking to me,' she explained breathlessly. 'He may not mean any harm, but I don't wish him to speak to me.'

'Where are you going?' asked the officer.

'Home,' said Lila.

'Where is this man?'

Lila looked about. 'Why, he's gone!' she gasped.

'Come with me,' said the officer. 'I'll take you to the Avenue and put you on a bus and see that he doesn't get on. Will you be safe then?'

'Oh, yes! Thank you! He spoke to me inside the Museum and I ran away. I thought I had escaped, but he followed me.'

'Bad egg,' commented the policeman. 'Here you are. Up or down?'

'Down.'

Lila came at last to the Brandons' door. Standing on the step she looked back; there was no one on the street resembling her pursuer. The daylight was still bright, but she was afraid to stay outside. Within, a rare event was taking place. Rachel and Berenice seldom conversed, though both talked a great deal; now Rachel was talking and Berenice was answering.

'In another year we won't have enough to get into the Home, I tell you once more,' said Rachel in the shrill scream which alone could

penetrate Berenice's thickened ear. 'Then it'll be the Island.'

'I tell you once more that I can't walk down the steps.' Miss Berenice answered in her deep and placid bass; she was, as Miss Rachel said, stubborn and unfeeling. 'When I'm carried, it will be feet first.'

Lila went softly on her way and entered her own room. The voices ceased to echo, except for one shrill declaration.

'You could walk down if you would!' screamed Miss Rachel, whether into Miss Berenice's ear or merely into the surrounding air, Lila did not know.

Lila sat motionless in the chair into which she had dropped. She had not dared to stop at the drug-store to get coffee, she would sup on tea and crackers.

'I have less than five dollars left,' she said in a whisper.

Suddenly she gave her head a sharp twist. She had a queer consciousness of something advancing upon her — strange, impalpable, creeping, and she put out her hand to be sure that the key was turned. Whatever the

creature was, it seemed to be still far away, as far as the lower floor where lived Mr. Jay. It crept to the second floor where worked Miss Blanche La Rue, it came up and up. She cleared her throat for the sake of hearing a sound. There was no sound except what she produced; if Mrs. Cooper had entered the house and ascended the stairs, she had done so inaudibly.

Compelling herself to move, Lila rose and began to make her tea. Absurdly she tiptoed about. She cleared her throat again and tried in vain to hum a tune. Unreasoning, unreasonable horror oppressed her.

'I'll sell my pearls to-morrow, then I'll go away from this place,' she said to herself. 'There are lodging-houses and Girls' Friendly Societies. I'll appeal to Miss King; no matter if she is anxious about her sister, she'll help me. I don't know what I'm afraid of, but I'm afraid.'

She began to transfer clothing from the wardrobe to her trunk. Every few minutes she lifted her hand to touch her pearl beads, not now because they were friendly, but be-

cause she could get money for them. Presently she opened the collar of her dress and fastened it again with them inside.

A long while after darkness had fallen and even the street noises had quieted down, she sat fully dressed upon her bed. Her trunk was packed and locked. Not satisfied with feeling her beads against her neck, she put up her hand again to touch them.

'If I could get twenty-five dollars, I'd be almost safe,' said she. 'If I could get thirty, or forty, or fifty, I'd ——' She sighed, and her sigh was cut short. There was a faint creak, she turned her head and looked at the direction from which it came. Was the key being turned?

'Nonsense!' said she; nevertheless, she instantly laid her hand on the key. Against her thumb was an unmistakable pressure. The pressure ceased; whatever the motive power, it was not strong enough to oppose even a slight touch on the key itself. There was perfect stillness, then an almost inaudible sound, such as might be made by a slippered foot or a bare foot tiptoeing cautiously, then

a little click, like that made by the careful sliding of a bolt.

'Here I'll sit till morning,' said Lila. 'And by to-morrow evening, I'll be gone from this gruesome house forever.'

Suddenly she began to shiver. There was the stranger who stared at her in such a simple-minded fashion when she was on her way in the bus to ask Wickerham and Carter for work; there was the rude man in Farrar and Johns'; there was the fat man on the Avenue from whom she had escaped only by accident; there was the older and much more disagreeable stranger at the Museum. There was also, alas! the young man with the square chin and the bright eyes.

'I must have stared at them,' she said. 'I'm very thin, and perhaps I look a little hungry and pathetic. I don't care about the others, but he ought to have had better manners.'

Her cheeks cupped in her hands, she sat staring into the dim corner of the room — there was the square-chinned young man! She looked at the window — there he was

also! At last she buried her face in the pillow and escaped him. There, however, sleep, from which she also tried to escape, overpowered her, and dressed as she was, and lying in an uncomfortable position, she lay motionless till morning.

CHAPTER X

LILA OFFERS HER PEARLS FOR SALE

It was Monday morning at ten o'clock, and Lila rose from her chair by the window and crossed the room. She had eaten her meager breakfast and had made her bed, then she had placed her beads in their handsome box and the box in her handbag. She held the bag under her arm, pressing it tightly, the strap which formed a handle interlaced in her fingers. Her trunk was now locked and ready to be moved as soon as she could give the order. She hoped to get away without seeing any one, but she was disappointed. Opening the door she saw Miss Rachel outside, stooping as though she had been listening at the keyhole.

'Miss Tryon!' There was on Rachel's wild face unmistakable relief. She was in the hall alone. Mrs. Cooper's door was closed — either she was within or she had departed unheard. 'I was afraid!'

'Afraid of what?'

'I couldn't hear you moving. You never know what may happen. Are you going out?'

'Yes.'

Rachel went down the stairs, talking as she walked. 'It's going to be a very hot day.'

'It is,' agreed Lila, shivering as though a wave of heat passed over her.

'Coming back soon?' Rachel was behaving unnaturally; she seldom offered any observation or prolonged any conversation.

'I don't know, Miss Rachel.'

Lila opened the front door and stepped out upon the stone steps. Already the street was like a furnace and the concrete pavement felt hot to her soles. Tony's heart was warm and his work was well done, but his materials were poor.

'I have forty blocks to go,' said she to herself. 'I'll take it slowly.'

Intense as the heat was, she did not suffer except from the burning sensation in her feet. She did suffer, however, from weariness so great that she was alarmed. Before the steps of Saint Thomas's Church she halted, unable to proceed. She decided that she would enter

the beautiful building and sit for fifteen minutes until she recovered her strength. She did not get to the door, but on the steps outside she sat down, perforce. She tried to hold her head erect; then the passers-by might think her strange behavior was due to a whim. Realizing that some one was speaking to her, she looked up.

'That's my place,' declared a shrill voice. 'I've had it for five years. You must get out; I've told you twice.'

Before her stood an old woman leaning on crutches. Her body might be crippled, but her eyes glittered.

'You may have it!' said Lila. 'I didn't hear you.'

'Of course I may have it,' snapped the sharp old woman. 'And I don't have to ask permission from you either.'

Revived by the few minutes' rest and enlivened by her amusement, Lila walked on, past the beautiful shop windows filled with delicate materials and gay hats and books and pictures and strange new flowers. Coming at last to an intersection where the

traffic light was against her, she stopped and looked across at the building of Brinley, Barton and Stark. It was occupied entirely by the firm, and her head swam as she thought of the incredibly valuable site and of the gems and delicate workmanship within.

Round the window there was an ever-arriving, ever-vanishing group which had almost dissolved away when the signal changed and the fifty waiting pedestrians crossed the street. Immediately the curious crowd swelled to at least thirty. Glancing at the window, Lila saw that it contained but a single article, a ring set with a squarely cut green stone. She was tempted in sudden consternation and apprehension of failure to stop and look, thus postponing her offer of her beads, but, pale and trembling, she took the single step beyond the window and entered the door.

Within was a dim and pleasant coolness. The floor was tiled, the dark showcases were massive. To Lila's eye even the space near by was lost in shadow. As she stood trying to get her bearings, a young man dressed in the

elegance of cutaway coat and gray trousers came forward.

'Yes, madam?'

'I came' — Lila faltered, grew silent; then by a mighty effort succeeded in repeating her inaudible words in a louder tone — 'I came to see about some imitation pearl beads.'

'We do not handle imitation pearls, madam.' The young man spoke with careful courtesy. 'You can probably find them in Chevalier's or any other department store.'

'You did handle them once,' said Lila.

'Long ago, I believe we did, and only once, for the Christmas trade. We have none in stock now, and I'm sure we shall not handle them again. Is there anything else I can show you?'

'I didn't come to buy anything,' explained Lila. 'I came to see whether you wouldn't take back a string of beads which were bought here two years ago.' She tried to open her bag, but her hand shook so she could not turn the clasp.

'I'm very sure we couldn't take any beads back, Miss.'

The clerk's store of politeness was exhausted; he was plainly amused. He stepped forward so that it was necessary for Lila to move, and she interpreted his motion as a hint that her departure would be welcome. Turning, she lost her balance, and, trying to regain it, she put out her hand and caught at the showcase. Her bag fell and, striking the floor, opened and the oval green box slipped out. As if summoned by the sound there appeared at once another and older man, also dressed in splendor. As the young man gathered up her property and returned it to her, the glance of the older man fell upon the green box.

'I have some pearl beads,' explained Lila. 'I wish to sell them, and I thought I'd bring them here because they were bought here and because I have confidence in this firm.'

The newcomer listened with grave, though slightly amused politeness. 'We handled pearl beads only once for the Christmas trade; then we discontinued them and shall never handle them again. That will be two years at Christmas and any pearl beads would

have deteriorated in that time. They lose their brilliancy. I'm sorry, Miss.' Polite as he was, he too moved firmly toward the door, so that Lila had to step before him.

'You won't even look at them? They haven't changed, I'm sure.'

'It wouldn't be worth our while to take your time.'

'Do you suppose' — a terrifying possibility entered Lila's mind — 'do you suppose I can sell them anywhere, for anything?' She opened the box, so that the older man might see the beads. 'They've been worn very little and they're surely not damaged at all. They have a very pretty clasp, and it must be solid silver or you wouldn't have——'

The two clerks shook their heads and as if in agreement they moved together toward the door with Lila between it and them. A third man glanced in their direction, then came forward. He was tall and stout and spoke with an air of authority.

'What's the difficulty?'

The older man answered as to a superior. 'Mr. Upham, this young lady thinks we may

buy back a string of imitation pearls bought at our Christmas sale two years ago. I tell her it's out of the question. Am I not right?'

Upham reached out his hand, moving it slowly as though to postpone the moment when he too must say the thing was impossible.

'Suppose you let me see them,' he said in a kind voice.

Lila gave him box and pearls; as he took them his hand felt warm against her icy finger-tips. The string of beads was, as she had said, unchanged, the color was softest bluish white. The chain and the clasp were untarnished, the brilliants shone. She looked up at Upham's face, seeking some favorable sign.

What she saw was a change of expression so amazing that she gave a little cry. Could it be that he thought her a thief? Panic-stricken, she glanced at the door, intending to run, but terror bound her feet to the spot. The door opened and two ladies entered. Blinded by the change from the bright light without, the first asked a question of any one

who was at hand to answer. She spoke with confidence, as one able to buy anything at any cost.

'What is the price of the emerald ring in the window?'

'One hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars, Mrs. Tyler,' replied the clerk nearest the door, obsequiously.

The enormous amount paralyzed a brain already reeling. Lila succeeded at last in turning toward the door, but one foot caught the other. To her further confusion and alarm she heard some one say in a sharp voice, 'Catch her!' She was right about the cry, but the command was alarmed and kindly, and not harsh or suspicious.

'Fainted!' said some one. 'Does any one have smelling-salts?'

'I have not fainted!' declared Lila, in a voice which belied her claim.

'Weighs about sixty pounds!' said some one else.

'A little coffee is all I need,' explained Lila, with as much dignity as one could assume when carried in a horizontal position at the

level of the shoulders of a young man in a cutaway coat.

'We'll get you coffee,' promised three alarmed voices at once.

Lila uttered an hysterical giggle. 'Am I in a procession?' she asked in a foolish tone.

No one answered, but as though they were in a procession, the three men strode the length of the store, the young man in the lead, the older men following.

CHAPTER XI

LILA MEETS SEVERAL PLEASANT GENTLEMEN

LILA lay on a deep, leather-covered davenport in a paneled room furnished otherwise with a desk, a few large leather-covered chairs, and a few steel engravings. A pleasant-looking woman sat beside her, a gentleman whom she had not seen before sat at the desk, and beside him stood Mr. Upham, her green box in his hand. She had not been entirely unconscious; she had merely been unable to speak, and she had heard distinctly all that had been said.

'All right, Mr. Brinley!' Upham had said excitedly. 'Intact!'

'She'll recover in a minute, I'm sure.' This was the low voice of the pleasant-looking woman. 'I've sent for coffee.'

Lila recognized in herself the effect of aromatic spirits of ammonia. Refreshed and invigorated, she tried to sit up, and was bidden to lie still. Mr. Brinley swung round

in his chair; like Upham he was tall and stout and clean-shaven, the picture of success and prosperity. Both men looked at her intently and it seemed to her, with kindness, and her heart leaped. 'They'll give me something! I believe they really will give me something!' Her mind took up its old round like a squirrel in a cage. 'If they'd give me twenty dollars! If he'd give me twenty-five dollars!' She had once attended an auction and the auctioneer had gone like this from one sum to another. 'If he'd give me thirty dollars!'

A boy entered carrying a cup of coffee on a tray. She sat up and began to sip it, hot and black as it was, and color came into her cheeks. Brinley left his chair at the desk for a seat on the couch by her side.

'You're sure you feel better?'

'Yes.' She set down her cup. 'I believe that's all I can drink. I'm very sorry I've been such a trouble.'

'Oh, you haven't been a trouble!' answered Upham. 'Miss Rogers, we'll excuse you now. Remain near by where you can be called.

And will you see that Mr. Harland does not leave the building?'

Miss Rogers went out, smiling at Lila over her shoulder.

Upham drew up a chair — the two gentlemen were like a court, but a friendly court.

'Now, we can talk,' said Upham. 'Will you first of all tell us your name?'

'My name is Lila Tryon.'

'And where do you live?'

Lila gave the address of the Brandon sisters. 'I have a room there with two elderly ladies.'

'You have no family — father, mother, brothers?'

Mr. Brinley misinterpreted the change of expression on Lila's face. He leaned forward and spoke earnestly. 'Miss Tryon, we're inclined to help you all we can. Will you not, to help us, give us a little story of your life, so to speak, beginning at the beginning?'

'Why, yes!' said Lila. 'Surely! My father was a writer, Horace Tryon. You can find his name in many publications. He wrote articles for encyclopædias for many years, and book reviews for magazines. I haven't

anybody else except very distant relatives with whom I'm not acquainted. Last winter he died, and I took a place in Wickerham and Carter's bookstore. They engaged me only until summer, but they have engaged me again from the middle of August and they're paying me a kind of bonus each month. The trouble was ——' Lila paused, her cheeks scarlet.

'Yes?' said Mr. Brinley. 'Please be frank. What was the trouble?'

'My father's savings were all spent for doctors' bills and other expenses. I hadn't any money ahead, and I had only one valuable possession, a necklace.'

'You mean this necklace?'

'No, I know that isn't valuable; that is, not very valuable. I mean a string of gold beads. I pawned them, but I didn't get very much for them. When that money was spent, I thought I'd see whether you'd take back the pearl beads. My father bought them in your store. I've taken very good care of them.'

'How much did you expect to get for them?' inquired Upham.

'I didn't set any price. And I didn't know they would deteriorate.'

'Imitation pearls do deteriorate,' explained Brinley. 'Now — remember we're not unreasonably inquisitive, Miss Tryon — will you please tell us just when you got those beads, and, if you know, how much your father paid for them?'

'I can tell you all about them.' Lila did not, however, speak as promptly and as briskly as before. She seemed to be a great bowl in which gallons of coffee swirled back and forth. 'Just before Christmas my father received fifty dollars for a story called "The Cause of the Poor," and he came here the same day and bought these pearls and gave them to me for a Christmas present. It was December 24, two years ago.' Lila paused — thoughts of her father alternated with a desire to fill the great well within her, and she began to cry and to talk at random.

'For some weeks a queer woman has been pursuing me. I think she's been trying to steal my gold beads, a Mrs. Cooper. She came to live at the Misses Brandon's where I

live. She has a room across the hall and she tries my door at night. She ——'

Lila ceased to speak. Returning to consciousness, she found herself prone upon the couch. Miss Rogers was in the room again, and a stranger, who was neither Upham nor Brinley, sat on the couch beside Lila, his hand on her wrist.

'What this young woman needs, and I suspect all she needs, is food,' said he.

'Food!' repeated Brinley in a horrified tone. 'How terrible! Miss Rogers, get her food as quickly as you can!'

The doctor went away and Lila lay very still. In a few minutes the boy reappeared, carrying a tray heavily laden with plates, flat silver, and covered silver urns. The urns were beaded with steam, and from them escaped odors so pleasant that they were almost overpowering.

'I'll not eat greedily,' said Lila to herself with determination. 'I'll chew every bite. I'll not seem starved!'

The soup was thick and hot, a meal in itself. She sipped it slowly and ate a cracker.

Upham departed and returned in a few moments, bringing with him a slender and not very tall young man. Lila did not look up, but the young man looked at Lila with a startled intensity which, whether it was that of curiosity or admiration, brought a flush to his cheek. He had a pleasant face, very bright eyes, and a square chin.

'This is very good soup,' Lila said in a clear voice and with a little laugh. In spite of the seriousness of her financial situation, she felt revived, excited, cheerful, as she had not felt in the many weeks during which she had been deprived of all human society but that of the Misses Brandon. She felt an inclination to talk which she determined to resist.

'Miss Tryon, let me present Mr. Harland,' said Brinley. 'He's a detective in our employ. I have told him your story up to this point.'

Lila looked up, prepared to nod. 'Good-morning,' she began, but at sight of the newcomer she stopped short, her lips still parted. The color left her cheek, then surged back.

'Good morning, Miss Tryon,' said Har-

land in a business-like way and immediately averted his eyes as he looked round for a chair.

With an effort Lila also averted her eyes. She looked down into her cup. He remembered her — of that she was certain, but clearly he had no intention of acknowledging that he had seen her before. If he had been attracted to her for a moment, he was indifferent now.

No longer at ease she sat eating her soup. She determined not to glance at him again, but she could not help herself. He was now looking in another direction and his face was turned away; but she had made no mistake, she saw him clearly, standing beside his taller companion in the lobby of the Touraine. She had thought of him so often and so foolishly that she felt as though a friend had cut her dead.

'You must finish your lunch, Miss Tryon,' urged Brinley.

Lila took a few more mouthfuls. She swallowed with difficulty. 'What an idiot I've been!' she thought. 'If he looked at any one of us, it was at Miss Dorrance!'

'That's all I can eat, thank you,' she said.

Suddenly Harland seemed to take charge. He rose and lifted the tray from Lila's lap and placed it on the desk.

'Now we're ready,' said he.

All the gentlemen regarded Lila earnestly.

'Just before you went off, you were telling us something about a door and a woman,' said Brinley.

'Oh, was I?' said Lila.

'You were. Did you say a woman was following you?'

'I'm not sure. I'm inclined to think I suffered from delusions. I believed many people were following me. Once' — Lila frowned — 'I went into Farrar and Johns' bookstore to ask for a place and the manager looked at me as though — as though — oh, I can't tell you how he looked at me! The same day a man kept pace with me on the street, and yesterday I was in the Natural History Museum and there a respectable-looking older man spoke to me and followed me outside and I had to call a policeman.'

'Were you wearing your gold beads?' asked Brinley.

'No, they were pawned two weeks ago. After I decided that Mrs. Cooper had followed me, I wore them under my dress and these pearl beads outside. But I suspect that I imagined everything. I guess' — Lila flushed again — 'I suppose I was hungry and irresponsible.'

'You say the woman's name is Mrs. Cooper — how do you know?'

'There is a Mrs. Cooper,' answered Lila wearily. 'Though I'm not sure now that she's the same as the other woman. The day I was laid off, I was very much troubled and excited, and there was a woman standing in front of Wickerham and Carter's as I came out. She looked at me queerly and intently, and afterwards she went in and asked my address. Then a woman who resembled her took a room at the Misses Brandon's. It isn't a place one would find easily. She's very queer and reserved and she pays by the day.'

'What does she look like?' inquired Har-

land. His voice was quiet, and he spoke again in a short, business-like fashion. He looked at Lila with cool but earnest attention as though she were some sort of specimen, interesting but not altogether pleasant.

'She has a sort of Spanish look, very white, with dark eyes and heavy lids. Sometimes she seems to be half asleep.'

'And you think she tried to steal your gold beads?' said Harland.

As he leaned forward, his bright eyes on Lila's, Brinley and Upham leaned back as though they left matters in his hands.

'I think she was in my room. I always keep the door locked, but I may say I'm sure she was there. And I believe she tried my door at night.'

'When?'

'Last night.'

'Does she know you pawned your gold beads?'

'I don't see how she could.'

'Do you think she'd make another try at stealing them?'

'I believe she would.'

'Had you intended to go back there to-night?'

'I hadn't made up my mind. I knew that I'd have to go back if I didn't get money for my pearls. I thought if I succeeded in selling them, I'd stay in a lodging-house, and to-morrow I'd fetch my trunk.'

Harland glanced at Brinley and Upham and met the eye of each. He looked back at Lila.

'Would you be unwilling or afraid to go back there to-night?'

'N-o,' answered Lila slowly. 'The Misses Brandon are queer, but they're honest, and I can lock my door and barricade it with the bureau.'

'Miss Tryon' — Harland drew his chair a little forward — 'we believe that you've given us a clue to the whereabouts of a thief, clever, successful, and long pursued in vain. It's not likely that she'll reënter the house of the Misses Brandon unless you're there. Her game is usually gems, but perhaps gold beads are not to be despised, since summer is a poor time for her trade. Would you be willing' —

again Harland drew his chair a little forward — 'would you be willing to go back there to stay the night?'

'Yes,' said Lila slowly. 'I think I would.'

'You're sure there's nothing else in the house which would attract a thief?'

Lila smiled. 'Oh, no!'

'What time do you usually go to your room?'

'About six o'clock.'

'Don't you go out in the evening?'

'Not often. For a long time I've been too tired or worried.'

'Then go to your room at six and lock the door. You'll not be in any danger whatever.'

'She tried to turn the key,' said Lila. 'I saw it move and held it.'

Harland took from his pocket a little device of twisted wire. 'Have you your key here?' Lila passed it to him. 'You slip this over the doorknob, and this through the hole in the handle of the key.'

'I see.'

'Then it can't be moved. It is our in-

tention ——' Harland glanced again at the two older men. 'You see we have entire confidence in you, Miss Tryon. It's our intention to try to capture this woman, who is wanted on various charges. Let me say again that you will be in no danger.'

'Will you have officers?' asked Lila.

'We'll have officers.' Harland put his hand into his pocket and drew out a five-dollar bill. 'Let me have your purse. You're on our payroll to-night.'

'I have enough money for to-night,' said Lila.

'You might need more than you have,' said Brinley earnestly. 'Please eat a substantial dinner and breakfast.'

'I'll take the money on account,' stipulated Lila gravely. 'We'll deduct it if you take my beads.' She looked at Harland; he avoided her direct glance. She felt an immeasurable pang of disappointment.

Harland repeated her words. 'On account, if we take your beads.'

'And I'm to come back!' Lila rose and stood steadily. 'You see I'm all right.'

'Oh, yes, you're to come back!' said Brinley and Upham together.

'To-morrow morning?'

'The first thing to-morrow morning.'

'And you'll have made up your minds' — Lila flushed crimson — 'about my pearls?'

'We'll have made up our minds,' promised Brinley.

'I'll take you to the outer door,' offered Harland.

Brinley and Upham rose and both walked with Lila to the office door. Outside Harland turned to the right into a narrow passage, though Lila's sense of direction bade her turn to the left to reach Fifth Avenue. The building was deep, they passed at last through a fireproof door and came out into a narrow street.

'Most people don't know this little street is here. It's used by our employees. I wish I could escort you to the bus.'

'I'm not used to being escorted,' answered Lila with dignity. 'Is there any reason why I shouldn't stop at Wickerham and Carter's and inquire for my friend Miss King?'

'No-o.' Harland hesitated. 'You understand that absolute secrecy is imperative.'

'I understand.' Lila lifted her head proudly.

'I'm sure you do,' said Harland in a kinder voice. 'You understand, too, that you're in no personal danger?'

'Yes.'

His kindness changed again to curtness. 'Good-bye, then, till morning.'

Lila stepped out into the street and Harland looked after her. Unobserved by her, he had acquired a hat which he now put on his head. It was a soft hat; set on one side it gave him a rakish and unnatural air. With a step which appeared lazy, he followed out through the little street to the Avenue. But it was a long step which speedily brought him near enough to oversee Lila's every act. If he was prepared to slip into doorways or down side streets, he did not need to take his meditated precaution — Lila walked straight ahead, an erect and apparently self-sufficient person. Had he known the source of her self-confi-

dence he might have been touched, in spite of his indifference.

'I am fed,' said Lila to herself. She said the words again, and yet again. 'I am fed. I am fed.'

CHAPTER XII

MISS BERENICE WALKS DOWNSTAIRS

LILA walked slowly up Fifth Avenue. The heat had become intense, but there was no diminution of the crowd. The dim office, the courtly gentlemen, even Mr. Harland came to seem like a dream. She put her hand to her neck, she felt her handbag — no, it was not a dream, the pearl beads were gone. She frowned — her errand, the men, the inquiries, her ridiculous fainting, all seemed fantastic. But no detail was as fantastic as the task before her. Perhaps Mrs. Cooper would not return, perhaps she was an entirely innocent person. She thought uneasily of her beads — perhaps — but the idea that Brinley, Barton and Stark would play a trick upon a poor girl was more fantastic than all.

In one of the windows of Wickerham and Carter's there were copies of sumptuous bird books illustrated in color and greatly reduced in price; in the other were a hundred copies, at least, of the last thriller, 'The Yarrow

Murder,' the former to lure collectors who waited for summer sales, the latter to catch the eyes of commuters on their way to the Grand Central Station. Lila smiled — she could tell how many copies of each would be sold in a day, and she knew just the profit on each. She longed hungrily to be back at work.

'How happy I shall be!' she thought. 'And never again shall I be vain and silly.'

Inside the long store all was dim to the first glance, but her eye became instantly adjusted to the light. Miss Fowler and Miss Graham hailed her as she passed through to the Children's Department. Miss King looked pale and she had lost weight. She explained that her sister's operation could be no longer postponed and would take place during her own two weeks' vacation.

'I've put aside twenty dollars to lend you, Miss Tryon,' she said. 'I've been worried about you. If you need it, it's ready.'

'Perhaps I won't need it,' answered Lila. 'I earned a little money in a beauty shop.'

'Good!' said Miss King. 'Next year things will be better. You might let me show you

some of the new stock.' Miss King's face glowed; she had a passionate love for books and for her business with them.

At five o'clock Lila proceeded on her way. She walked through Fifty-Seventh Street to Sixth Avenue and there entered a drug-store. Still hungry and loath to go into the dark and musty house of the Brandons, she added a plate of ice cream to her menu and ate it slowly. As she came out a young man moved away from the corner. He wore a hat on one side and carried his hands in his pockets. She did not give him a glance.

When she turned back into Fifty-Seventh Street, her heart began to throb. She had intense enjoyment in credible adventures in books — here was adventure!

The shade on Mr. Jay's door was drawn; he had retired to the rear and was eating his supper — to this the odor of freshly frying onions testified. Miss La Rue's beauty shop was closed also; no doubt she had gone out to meet a cavalier and to be gay. From above echoed as usual the voice of Rachel; she and Berenice were holding, not their accustomed

solos in which each sang from her own score, but one of their rare conversations.

'If I could walk down the stairs I'd go in a minute,' declared Berenice, her voice such as might issue from an image of stone, heavy and mournful. 'But when I'm carried it'll be feet first. It's perfectly plain that the Lord wants me to stay here.'

'I tell you once more and for the last time' — this was Rachel, shrill and angry — 'if we sell this house before the next taxes are due, we can get into the Wainwright Select Home. We postpone it, and sure as fate we go to the Island.'

There was no answer; Lila guessed that Berenice was ponderously shaking her head. Stepping gently, she passed on to her room.

'Mrs. Cooper will come back,' declared Berenice in a placid rumble. 'With two good lodgers we're all right.'

'She may never come back!' shrieked Rachel. 'She paid me this morning. If she does come back, she won't stay forever.'

Lila entered her room and, locking the door, adjusted Harland's little device. She sat

down by the window. By and by she lit her lamp and tried to read, but the words danced before her eyes. She had met as by a miracle the young man of whom she had thought so often. But was he really the same young man? Perhaps if she saw him again she might ask him if he had been in the Touraine on the twenty-sixth of February.

After a while she heard slow footsteps coming up the stairs.

'You're back?' said Rachel, her tone at once relieved and distrustful.

'I'm back,' answered Mrs. Cooper. Hitherto Lila had not heard her voice; it was deliberate, strange; she seemed to consider each word critically before she uttered it. 'I may go out again.'

The noises in the street died down, the noises in the house ceased altogether, the odor of onions grew stronger. By and by there were little scratchings and gnawings; mice abounded in the partitions. Lila turned out her light and sat again by the window. A young man sauntered past on the other side of the street — had he anything to do

with the projected capture of Mrs. Cooper? Would the officers come in uniform or plain clothes? Would they be armed?

Suddenly fear came upon Lila and she rose to her feet. The house was now horrible, a prison from which she should never escape. She stood with her hands tightly clasped, holding her breath. She heard the tiniest creaking, not the gnawing of a rat, but the creak of a board. Lifting her hands to her throat, she held them there.

The board creaked again, the knob turned; instantly there was a woman's shriek, the sound of a scuffle, a man's stern admonition. 'Quiet!'

Mrs. Cooper would not be quiet; she uttered a low wailing, a sound neither of rage nor of fright, but of mental confusion. There came, however, another sound of unadulterated terror. Hearing the amazing disturbance above, Rachel rose from her bed and opened her door, then leaped back.

'Fire!' she shouted in the ear of Berenice. 'Fire!'

'Where?' shrieked Berenice, as she sprang up.

'There's no fire!' answered a man. 'Listen to me!'

'Fire!' cried Miss Rachel again.

'Miss Tryon!' This was Harland, speaking anxiously, close to the panels. 'Please open the door, Miss Tryon.'

With shaking fingers Lila removed the twisted wire and turned the knob. The brightly lighted hall was filled with men, in plain clothes and in uniforms. Two held Mrs. Cooper, who struggled now against the one, now against the other.

'Jennie, another sound and you'll be gagged!' said a sharp voice.

An officer ran down to the next floor, where he could be heard trying to explain to the Brandon sisters this extraordinary interruption of their sleep.

'She's walked down!' screamed Rachel. 'My sister's walked down the stairs!'

Lila looked over the banister. Three flights below, dimly outlined, stood Berenice. She had put on her black gown and her slippers, and on her own feet she had descended. She had not stopped to find her

wig, and in her whitening hair she was a pleasant and not in the least an awe-inspiring old lady.

'This settles it!' shouted Rachel in a kind of hysteria. 'To-morrow we leave!'

The officers half led, half carried Mrs. Cooper down the stairs. Harland stood close to Lila as though to protect her from further confusion and alarm.

'She's the woman we've been hunting for,' said he. He looked about as if to satisfy himself as to the security and comfort of Lila's abode. 'You'll surely come to the office in the morning, Miss Tryon?'

'Yes.'

'You're sure you'll be comfortable here for the night?'

Far below the front door closed sharply, there was the sound of a starting motor.

'Oh, yes!'

'You have plenty of money for your breakfast?'

'Yes, indeed!'

'See you, then, in the morning.'

Harland ran down the steps. Rachel and

THE BRIGHTLY LIGHTED HALL WAS FILLED WITH MEN, IN PLAIN CLOTHES AND IN UNIFORMS

Berenice were coming up. Berenice leaned upon the rail, but seemed to need no other aid. They paid no heed to the young man.

'To-morrow we go!' shrieked Rachel again, now in Berenice's ear, with a sob. 'To-morrow!'

'You haven't a buyer,' whimpered Berenice.

'I have a dozen,' declared Rachel.

CHAPTER XIII

LILA'S PEARLS ARE DISPOSED OF

TROUBLED by yesterday's expenditure for ice cream, which she could have gone without, Lila rode downtown on the Elevated instead of on a bus and walked across to Brinley, Barton and Stark's. She had not wakened until past nine o'clock and it was now eleven. The day was warm, but there was no moisture in the air, and now and then a refreshing breeze fanned her cheek. She remembered with longing that within easy reach of those with deep purses lay river and bay, sound and beach.

'If I had money I'd take a sail round Staten Island,' said she, with a sigh. 'That is, if I had money enough!'

She expected that Brinley, Barton and Stark would give her a small amount in exchange for her beads and perhaps they would hold them and allow her to buy them back. Surely they would be grateful for her assistance in capturing Mrs. Cooper! They had

stated that Mrs. Cooper was a menace to all jewelers. Again a succession of numbers went round in her head — twenty dollars, twenty-five, thirty; if they would give her even twenty, she could manage without the help of Miss King, who was already sufficiently burdened.

When her interview was over, she would return to Fifty-Seventh Street. She would keep her room, she had decided, until the Misses Brandon moved out. Departure could not be as quickly arranged as Rachel thought, though ultimate departure and a comfortable home were certain.

The pleasant morning had brought many shoppers into the streets. Some were women from the country who carried bright flowers, some were young people, boys and girls or young men and young women, bound on excursions together. She passed the Touraine; already the first of the luncheon guests were turning in. She saw in imagination the tables set with smooth linen and gleaming silver and glass, heard the sound of low voices, saw pairs of eyes meeting each other

in friendliness. She felt an intense homesickness for Miss Dorrance, who was the last link with the past.

'I wish I might sometime ——' She did not complete her idle and useless wish. A sob rose in her throat, her mind was confused by fright. 'If they don't give me anything, what shall I do?' said she. She was afraid not only of hunger, but of the return of despair. Again figures danced before her eyes. Twenty, thirty, forty — but forty was absurd!

The glorious emerald ring was no longer on display in the window of Brinley, Barton and Stark — could it be that it had already been sold? She wished that she might find the rear entrance and avoid the long show-room, but that was impossible. She pushed open the screen door and entered, and immediately a young man came forward, the same young man who had greeted her yesterday and who had been first polite, then a little amused, and who had finally gently moved her toward the door.

'I have an appointment,' she explained, flushing red.

'Yes, Miss Tryon.' He had learned her name! She looked up — his place was taken by the older man who had also been kind and had concealed his amusement, but who had nevertheless helped her toward the door. 'Let me show you to the office, Miss Tryon. I hope you are quite well, Miss Tryon.'

Both men gave place to Upham, who hurried down the aisle.

'Good-morning,' said he. 'We've been waiting for you. Come this way.'

Lila entered the office and Mr. Brinley turned from his desk.

'Good-morning, Miss Tryon. I hear you've been very brave. Sit down.' He pressed a button and in a few moments young Harland appeared.

'Good-morning, Miss Tryon,' said he. 'Did you sleep?'

'Yes,' answered Lila. 'Well and long.' Her spirits rose; again her mental processes quickened in the company of intelligence. Incidents of the last weeks flashed into her mind — her visit to the two Italians, her conversations with Jay and Miss Blanche La

Rue, her inspection of the fishes in their carefully arranged habitat, the spectacle of Miss Berenice forgetting her lameness, or ceasing to pretend; she wished for an auditor to whom she might describe each of her queer acquaintances. It could not be that they would give her back her beads!

Brinley opened a drawer in his desk and took out a green oval box with gilt letters upon it. He opened it and put it down with the lid laid back. Lila sat, not in the corner of the couch where she had sat yesterday, but on a high and broad chair in which she looked very small. Conscious of the wide spaces beside her, she held herself straight. The three gentlemen faced her, each with a sort of excited holiday air. Did the hot summer sun have some queer stimulating quality which affected them all? Brinley put the tips of his fingers together.

'Miss Tryon, here's your necklace. What would you like to have for it? We've found, I might say, that it hasn't deteriorated in the least.'

A wild idea came into Lila's head. 'If

I could have what my father paid for it,' she said impulsively, 'how happy I should be!'

'That was ——'

'Fifty dollars.'

'What would you do with fifty dollars?' Brinley's voice had a slightly mocking, jocular tone.

'I should feel safe. I should be safe.'

'Suppose we gave you more than fifty dollars? You've been, you know, of great service to all those who sell or own jewels and also to the police force.'

'I should put part on interest, then I should feel still safer! I hope sometime to take a library course. But fifty dollars — I didn't expect fifty dollars!'

Brinley took the green case in his hand. In it lay not one string of pearls but two.

'Here are two strings of pearls, yours and another. Do you see any difference in their quality? Take them in your hand.'

'My pearls are bluer,' answered Lila. 'And at the same time, whiter and heavier. And more lustrous. And more beautiful.'

'Exactly,' said Brinley. He laid both strings back on the table, the bluish pearls inside their box; then he leaned forward. 'Miss Tryon, on the day before Christmas year before last, through some mischance which we have never been able to explain, a string of matched pearls — these' — he pointed to the green case — 'were sold by mistake for a string of pearl beads. How they went or where they went, we have never discovered. We had a string of pearl beads we couldn't account for; we had lost a valuable string of matched pearls.'

'We thought a clerk temporarily employed might have deposited them in a tray of imitation pearls meaning to recover them later,' said Upham.

'We've had the pawnshops watched — no pearls,' Brinley went on. 'Rich people who wear jewels to great functions — no pearls; no pearls anywhere. But these are they, Miss Tryon, sold somehow to your father by mistake. They are worth a good deal more than fifty dollars. What shall we give you for them?'

'What my father paid,' said Lila, growing pale. 'Wouldn't that be fair?'

Brinley opened another drawer and took out a long narrow slip of paper. Upon it was written, 'Pay to the order of Lila Tryon, Two Thousand Dollars.'

'In the first days of our loss,' said he, 'that was the reward we hopefully decided upon.'

Lila looked at the little slip which Brinley laid upon her knee.

'How much are they worth?' she asked in a whisper. A vast sum now went round in her head — a hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars for an emerald!

'They were worth fifty thousand dollars the day they disappeared. Since then the value of pearls has risen somewhat.'

'And I've been wearing them for every day!' gasped Lila. 'In buses and museums and on the street!'

'In buses and museums and on the street,' repeated young Harland. 'And in the Touraine Restaurant.'

Lila gasped. 'Then it was you! I recog-

nized you yesterday. You were one of the people who stared at me.'

'You vanished like magic,' said Harland. 'You looked so different from the people you were with, I thought perhaps you were being kidnaped.'

'Oh, no!' said Lila. 'Oh, no!'

'I made every effort to follow you,' said Harland. 'The wonder is not that so many people followed you, but so few. The wonder is' — Harland spoke as though he were profoundly disturbed, though all danger was past — 'that they weren't snatched from your neck, indeed that you didn't suffer some serious injury. All that saved you from Mrs. Cooper is that her mind is torpid from drugs. She's absolutely unprincipled.'

Brinley took from his pocket another paper. 'Now, my dear, sit tight!' He held it toward Lila — it looked like a sheet from a police report. She saw only scattered words.

'Reward' — 'notorious and clever gem thief' — 'numerous other aliases' — 'Jennie Fitch' — 'Eva Turner.' A sum of money was printed in large letters — '$1,000 Reward.'

Lila grew deathly pale.

'It's yours,' said Upham gravely.

'Mine!'

'Yours,' said Brinley, smiling. 'What are you going to do with your money?'

The color returned slowly to Lila's cheeks. 'I can't believe it!'

'It's true,' said Brinley. 'Now, what are you going to do?'

'I'll first of all tell my good friend Miss King that I won't need the twenty dollars she offered to lend me,' said Lila slowly. 'I'll tell her that, on the other hand, I can lend her twenty dollars if she needs it.'

'And then?' prompted Brinley.

Lila's eyes sparkled, her color returned in a rush. 'I'm going to ride to Staten Island on the Ferry for a lark!'

Brinley smiled more broadly. 'And then?'

'Then I'll put what's left on interest,' laughed Lila.

'Perhaps we can help you with that,' said Brinley. 'We owe you a great deal. We'd like you to keep in touch with us.'

'I owe you as much as you owe me,' an-

swered Lila. In spite of all she could do, tears filled her eyes.

Brinley rose and held out his hand. When she had put hers into it, he stood holding it.

'You'll wish to deposit the check — perhaps you'd like to go to the bank with which we deal. And also you must go to City Hall; they have sent word for you to come to-day. Harland will go with you.'

'That would be very kind,' said Lila.

Brinley patted her hand and let it go and she shook hands with Upham.

'Remember to look in on us,' said he.

'I will,' promised Lila.

Harland walked with her out the passage-way and through the long show-room. The clerks looked at her with interest, and the very slender young man came forward to open the door. Harland stepped out beside her and put on his hat.

'I have a plan,' said he. 'Let's eat lunch, then let's go to City Hall and the bank, then let's explore Staten Island.'

Lila looked round at him. 'Don't you have

to work?' she asked gravely and a little disturbed.

Harland laughed. 'I'm appointed by the firm to accompany you on your lark,' said he. 'I'm appointed by myself to make it a real one.'

Lila stood still; she saw the dingy house of the Brandons; it was not merely dingy, it was sinister. She felt the sharp stone in her shoe, she saw the eyes of the manager of Farrar and Johns' store. 'He thought I was a thief!' she said to herself. She heard the fatherly voice of the tall stranger in the Museum. The city was a jungle, and there were beasts prowling.

'What is it, Miss Tryon?' asked Harland.

Lila pressed her hand to her lips. 'Have you ever known what it is not to have money ahead?'

'Have I!' Harland laid a friendly hand on her arm.

She turned her head; his eyes were upon her; she saw experience, kindliness, gayety, even — could it be? — admiration. Light returned to her face, the sunlight seemed to re-

turn to the sky. She laughed. 'I'd like to tell you about my queer friends and my nice friends.'

'I've queer friends to tell you about also,' said Harland.

'How did you think I got the pearls?' asked Lila. 'They didn't match the rest of my attire.'

'I didn't see the pearls.' Harland watched her with a quizzical eye. 'I've been connected with Brinley, Barton and Stark for only a few weeks. I never heard of the lost pearls till yesterday. When Upham told me his story and I walked in and saw you, I was astounded.'

'Why did you try to follow us, then?' asked Lila. 'That is, I thought — Mr. McClean thought ——'

Confused, she looked up — straight into Harland's eyes. Still more confused, she looked quickly away.

'I mean Mr. McClean thought you were looking at us,' she explained, her cheeks scarlet.

'I was,' confessed Harland.

'He was anxious about me,' went on Lila. 'I'll tell you how it all happened. He thought it wasn't safe for me to go about alone.'

'And he was right, wasn't he?' said Harland.

Smiling, he guided her to the inner side of the pavement, where from the doorway of the Touraine came a current of cool air, refreshing, enticing, scented with heartening odors of food.

'Hungry?' said he.

'Here!' cried Lila gleefully. 'Are we going to have lunch here?'

'Right here!' Harland laughed as though he were not only happy but excited. 'We're going to begin exactly where we left off.'

Lila stepped through the door and a waiter came forward. He was the same who had served McClean.

'Yes, sir?' said he. 'Yes, madam?' He motioned to the same table. 'If you please.'

Lila sat down, her cheeks glowing. She breathed a deep breath.

'I've been through a good deal of anxiety since I sat here,' she said tremulously.

Harland laughed. 'So have I!'

'But now I'm safe,' declared Lila. 'Safe! I have a little — no, I have a great deal of money ahead.'

THE END

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